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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

DICK DARESOME'S ICE VICTORY, OR, SKATING A RACE AGAINST DEATH.

By FRANK FORREST.



Over the swaying, cracking shore ice Dick glided with powerful strokes. His sweetheart bobbed up and down in the current of the river, vainly clutching at the ice cakes for support. To save her seemed impossible, but Dick sped on.

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DICK DARESOME'S ICE VICTORY

OR,

SKATING A RACE AGAINST DEATH

By **FRANK FORREST**

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

DICK DARESOME, aged 18, the most popular student in Merrivale Academy.

SAM THORPE, his jolly roommate, same age.

CHESTER BROWN, a crippled student and a warm friend of Dick's.

STUART ARMSTRONG, student leader of the rival school, Belleville Academy, located three miles away.

HENRY BENSON, also of Belleville, and an enemy to Dick.

BESS MORRISON, the belle of Greenvale Academy for Girls, and Dick's sweetheart.

GRACE GRAY, her roommate, at the academy.

GIPSY JOHN, a wanderer with a band of followers.

CHAPTER I.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

"Help!" screamed a girlish voice as the ice in the Greenvale River cracked with an ominous crunching sound.

She had been skating well toward the middle of the frozen stream, when suddenly a small rift in the glassy substance had grown into an ever-widening abyss.

"Help!" cried the pretty girl again as she toppled into the freezing water through the bobbing cakes of ice.

No one was within hailing distance when she first lost her balance, and it seemed as if she were to sink unaided to the chill depths of an icy grave under the surface of the river.

"Oh! will no one hear me?" she cried to herself in despair as she clung to the bobbing blocks of ice to keep her head above water. "I should never have left the rest of the girls to skate here alone!"

But regrets were too late now.

Wider and wider spread the big crack in the ice, because the force of the current was causing more and more of the surface to crumble off into the surging waters beneath.

"Oh, I'm dying!" screamed the girl in a last frantic effort to make herself heard.

Still no one came.

She held on with stiffening fingers to the ice, and safety seemed such a little distance away that it was horribly tantalizing.

"If I could only kick these heavy skates off!" she thought to herself miserably. But they had been strapped by the skilful, wiry fingers of Dick Daresome, and they were on to stay.

All seemed lost now, for it was almost dark about her—the early dusk of the winter's afternoon. There was no reply to her weak cries.

"They're all watching Dick in that trial hockey game," thought the girl to herself as the water came nearer and nearer her chin. "If these skirts only hold me up a little longer I may scream again."

She drew a long breath and once more raised her voice in a heart-rending call for assistance.

"Please, please help me! I'm dying!"

Far down the river, round the bend, a group of young folks were skating back and forth. The boys had built fires along the bank, and many of the girls from Greenvale Academy were flitting around on nimble skates, watching the boys practice at their ice hockey.

Suddenly the captain of one team gazed about him with an anxious look.

"Where is Bess Morrison, boys?" he cried.

The lads near him shook their heads.

"Oh, she's skating with some one or other up the river, I guess," replied one of his comrades. "Come on and finish up this practice rush, Dick."

The handsome youth thus addressed was not in the mood for finishing his practice just at this particular moment.

"No, I promised the preceptress of the girls' academy that I would look after Bess, and I don't break my word."

He glided over toward one of the girls, who was doing fancy figures on the outside of the group.

"Grace, did you see Bessie?" cried Dick Daresome.

The young girl looked up at him in alarm.

"Why, I thought she was with you, Dick!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"She's not, and it's getting dark. I wonder if those girls on the bank yonder could have noticed her?"

Dick skated rapidly to the shore.

"Girls, did you see Bess Morrison skating along here?" asked our hero.

One of the girls spoke up.

"Yes, I saw her just as I was walking down this way from the bridge. She was skating along up the river by herself. Up that way!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Dick in astonishment, "what's that noise?"

It was just at this minute that the ice cracked along the center of the river. Dick whirled about to see the figures of his companions darting toward the shore.

"The ice is broke, Dick!" shouted one of his friends, forgetting all about grammar in such a crucial time. "Where is Bess? Have you found her?"

"No, I haven't—worse luck!" groaned Dick in dismay. "I do not know where to look for her, either!"

"She went up that way!" cried the girl on the bank. "I saw her skate around the curve in the bank, and under the bridge!"

Dick looked up the river. The bridge mentioned was about a quarter of a mile away from him, while the ice was breaking more and more every instant.

"Come ashore, Dick!" cried one of his friends. "You can walk up the bank and see where she is. I know that

Bess is clever enough skater to be safe long ere this from that breaking ice."

"Walk!" cried Dick scornfully. "Do you think I am going to wait that long to find out where she is?"

"Dick!" shouted another lad. "Don't take such foolish chances as to skate along this ice now. Walk, you silly!"

But young Daresome had parleyed long enough.

A vague presentiment of impending evil prompted him to speed along in the direction indicated by the observing girl on the river bank.

"There's not a second to lose, I know," murmured Dick to himself as he skated along with swift strides.

"Dick—Dick!" shouted a friend. 'Then seeing that the brave and thoughtful youth was racing ahead to find the missing girl, the speaker dashed along after him, skating as well.

"I'll follow Dick and we'll work together if there is any trouble," said this individual to himself. "It's a pretty big chump of a roommate who won't help out when his pal's sweetheart is in danger!"

Thus they skated along, and still another of Dick's friends, Alan Brownson, followed the gallant roommate, Sam Thorpe.

For, as the reader can easily see, Merrivale Academy boys were of the sort that stick together in danger.

Click! Clickety-click!

How the skates rang out on the early evening air as the boys raced along!

Dick Daresome was in the lead, and he rapidly distanced his pursuers. For Dick heeded not the biggest apparent danger in the ice below and before him.

"There's a corker of a crack!" muttered Dick to himself as he beheld an open space before him which threatened his progress.

But the gallant lad hesitated not the fraction of a minute. He was too worried over the possible mishap of his sweetheart. So he pulled his muscles together and leaped valiantly, high and clear, over the fissure in the ice.

Biff!

He struck the solid ice on the other side of the crack with a bump which nearly cost him his balance.

"Nearly a goner!" he cried, and then wiggled skilfully, until he had regained his equilibrium. Another step and he was all right again.

"Now for a spurt under that bridge!" muttered our friend as he let out his sinewy legs again with renewed vigor.

"Girl drowning!" was the terrible cry that reached his ears as he came beneath the bridge. Several people were running across the bridge waving their arms excitedly.

From some small houses on the roadside near by Dick could see more people emerging.

"Great guns!" he groaned with a deadly fear clutching at his heart, "can Bess be in danger?"

On he sped, while behind came his two faithful friends.

"Help!" came a faint scream which was barely audible above the crashing of the loosened ice.

It was the voice of his sweetheart!

"I must save her!" cried Dick Daresome in anguish as he saw far ahead in the open stretch an upraised arm.

It seemed to Dick that every bit of strength had oozed out of his sturdy young frame. In a danger to himself Dick would have faltered never an instant.

"This danger to Bess—it unmans me!" groaned Dick. "What can I do?"

But the boy gritted his teeth, just as a brave dog does before going into the death struggle with a wild beast. He clenched his cold fists until the nails cut into his palms.

But on he raced.

"Nearer!" he muttered to hold up his courage.

It was well, for Bess' strength had almost forsaken her. She was quite some distance from the solid ice by this time, and the poor girl was almost unconscious in her terrible peril.

"Will no one come to my aid?" she muttered to herself between cold, white lips.

Then all grew black before her eyes, and she lost all consciousness of every idea in the world, except that she must catch hold of something.

"Hurry, Dick!" cried Sam Thorpe, his roommate, some distance behind him. But Dick heard nothing except that cruel crashing of the ice as it churned back and forth in the fierce current.

"It must be crushing my Bess!" he groaned, and then he spurred himself on for his last few daring strokes.

Over the swaying, cracking shore ice Dick glided with powerful strokes. His sweetheart bobbed up and down in the current of the river, vainly clutching the ice cakes for support.

To save her seemed impossible, but Dick sped on!

It was a neck-and-neck race between Dick Daresome and the grim reaper, Death!

CHAPTER II.

STRUGGLING 'MIDST THE ICE CAKES.

Dick beheld the head of his sweetheart bob under the cruel waters. There was not an instant to lose!

But Dick Daresome did not lose his head, either, for he realized that every act of his must count in the fight, or else his cause would be a failure.

"Be careful, Dick—wait until we get some boards!" shouted Sam Thorpe, his roommate, from behind.

"Hurry—and I'll wait in the water!" responded Dick, snapping out his words with determination.

While he was speaking he was skilfully unclasping his skates, for the crafty Dick, after many such experiences, knew the terrible downward pull caused by skates when one was struggling in the water.

"There she is again!" cried one of the boys, rushing up behind them.

But Dick saw the white, choking face of Bess reappear for an instant. In that fraction of a second the brave lad crouched down and then with all the force of his body leaped across the bobbing blocks of ice.

"Oh, oh!" screamed some women on the bank, while the lads watched this daring act with dumfounded consternation.

"Dick will be struck on the head as he comes up!" groaned Alan Brownson in anguish of heart.

"Why didn't he wait for a board?" cried Sam, despairing as well.

But Dick's head came up like a flash, and the lad was within about ten feet of his drowning sweetheart.

"We must help him!" shouted Sam, skating rapidly back to the shore.

Meanwhile Dick, unmindful at first of the terrible chill of the water, had reached Bess as she started to sink again. He clasped her firmly under the shoulders.

"Hold up your head, Bess!" he cried.

But the poor girl was too far gone with fright and cold to be able to help him the slightest bit.

"Hurry, boys, get a board of some sort!" shouted Dick to the lads who now were clustering around as near as possible on the firm ice.

But this was none too near, for the current was swinging them in a gradual curve further and further away from the shore.

"I can't find anything!" said Sam as he gazed up and down in the dusk of the darkness along the shore. "There's not even a toothpick in sight!"

"We must get something, for Dick is being swept away from shore every minute!" put in Alan, who had skated up to help.

The boys looked in vain.

"We must get something from that house up there! Surely there must be some boards around that little store by the end of the bridge!" said Sam.

All this while Dick was battling furiously with the current of the water. The swift-flowing Greenvale was a terrible opponent, and would have given Dick a fearful task even had he been unencumbered with the body of the unfortunate girl.

"Oh, there's hardly any use in fighting now," said Dick as the waters carried him further and further from the solid ice.

Bang! A floating cake of the river ice swung around and brought up with a dull but most uncomfortable thud against our hero's head.

"Ouch!" he groaned, dodging back as well as he could. "It looks pretty bad for me here, and no mistake!"

Biff! Some more chunks of the frozen liquid came into collision with the youth's shoulders as he bravely swam along, holding up the girl's unconscious form.

"This is fierce!" muttered Dick, "but I'll keep up as long as there's a little bit of strength left me!"

He realized that he was too worn out with the labor of

swimming to cry to his friends. He realized that it was safest to husband his strength.

"Dick, we're coming with a rope!" shouted the cheery voice of his roommate.

It seemed to Dick Daresome that the sound came from miles and miles and miles away. But in reality Sam was following along down on the shore ice, which was still unaffected by the break.

"Can you swim over toward shore, Dick?" cried Alan as they waved a rope. "We got this in the little house, and it ought to help all right!"

But the current relentlessly carried along the gallant young rescuer, and Dick's struggles availed him naught.

"I can't make it!" he called with all the vocal strength he could muster.

The boys could not distinguish his words in the crash of bumping ice, and the speed of the current took him further away. They saw that such a rescue was indeed a forlorn hope.

"What shall we do?" cried Sam.

"All is lost, I fear!" echoed Alan.

The boys and others who had rushed up to see the thrilling affair offered a dozen wild schemes.

"Let's hunt for a boat," said one.

But there was no time to go exploring, as Sam and Alan well knew. Dick could not possibly hold up more than five minutes at most. Every second was a notch in the scythe of the Grim Reaper, and it looked as if Dick and Bess were almost ready for the fatal harvest.

"Get a pole!" shouted another adviser.

"If we only had a balloon!" said a third visionary.

Suddenly a voice was borne to Sam's ears which he knew full well. It was that of Chester Brown, the crippled lad, his classmate.

"Sam, we must save Dick!" cried this youth. "I was watching and saw all this from the bridge there!"

"Oh! Chester, I'm afraid it is all up," said Sam dejectedly. "He is making a game fight, but there's no way of getting him. I'd jump in myself and help him out, but I could not reach him with these ice cakes floating so thickly!"

"What can we do?" asked Alan.

"I tell you you can do something—you must!" cried the lame lad. "I have an idea!"

"What?" cried Sam in pitiful suspense.

"You two fellows run out on that bridge and lower a noose to Dick as the current carries him under! You have already got your skates off—so hurry!"

The two lads saw that this scheme was a good one.

Without more ado they sped away toward the not far distant bridge. It was a low structure, and they saw that there was a good chance to catch Dick before the current dragged him past to the deadly regions of wider area below.

"Sam, we've got to race for it to head him off!" cried Alan as the two lads tore across the snow-covered ground.

"You bet—but we'll win!" said Sam between grunts, for he was speeding as he had never done before.

Around the bridge end they swung, and galloped out on the structure, Alan dragging the rope behind him.

"Now is our chance," said Sam as they saw to their delight that Dick had not reached the bridge yet.

"Coil the rope and make a loop first!" shouted the lame lad, hurrying as fast as his bad ankle would permit him. Chester was instinctively a general, and every little detail was worked out by him in any sort of plan.

"Quick, now, Sam!" said Alan. "Can't you clamber down that bridgework a little, so as to make sure that we get the loop to Dick?"

This was a happy thought, and Sam's wiry strength was in good aid here. Over the railing of the bridge and down the post he went.

"Steady! Be careful!" warned Chester from above.

"There comes Dick!" cried Alan. "Here, catch the end of this rope and get the loop to him!"

Sam braced himself as best he could on the little cross-piece and lowered the loop so that Dick might catch it. Our hero saw the approaching help, and his heart beat gladly again.

"Well, I am about all in! It's a good thing that something is happening," he thought to himself as he swam on a few strokes.

"Now, ready, Dick, and I'll get it around your shoulders!" cried Sam as he leaned forward.

"No, get it around Bess!" cried the gallant lad, ever ready to sacrifice his own safety for another. "I'll stand it if you get her up!"

With nimble hands Dick's roommate slipped the noose under the arms of Bess Morrison as Dick came near him in the current.

"Pull!" bellowed Sam, tugging himself at the rope to give some extra pull to the action. The boys above exerted their strength and hauled away like good fellows.

The form of the girl emerged from the water and was slowly pulled up to the level of the bridge, where willing hands lent their aid to bring her back to consciousness.

"But Dick—where's Dick?" cried Chester Brown, leaning over to look for his friend.

In the excitement young Daresome had drifted past the woodwork of the bridge, and was unable to catch hold of any of it. It looked as if he were doomed. But Dick was now free of the weight of the girl.

Besides that, the weight of his fear was off him, for he knew that his sweetheart was in the hands of friends who would bring her back to herself.

"I can stand anything!" breathed Dick as he struck out toward the shore. "It's not so far away now, and I know that Bess is all right!"

Sam, seeing that Dick had passed beyond help from the bridge, scrambled up on to the structure, while several of the boys rushed to the bank.

"Bring that rope along, Alan!" yelled Sam, and it was well that he had the forethought to order this.

The lads rushed down parallel with the swimming lad. Every stroke of Dick's arms grew weaker, for he had

been under a terrific strain all this time. The cold water was telling on his sinews, and he felt the deadly approach of cramps.

"Oh, gosh! I hope I don't get stung that way!" cried Dick, losing heart a little as he felt the telltale pains and stiffening of one leg.

"It's come!" he cried, as against his will that leg was suddenly drawn up full force against his body.

He was now swimming with one leg only, and his two arms, which were having hard work at it, numb and cold as they were. But Dick persevered with his usual stick-to-it grit.

"They'll never kill me without my fighting back!" he said to himself to keep his own spirits up.

"Dick, we're going to throw this rope to you!" shouted Sam, using his hands to form a trumpet. "Are you ready to catch it?"

Our hero now felt a twinge in one arm—it seemed to be all up. The cramp had paralyzed this limb as well!

"Oh, what's the use?" he muttered to himself in despair. But he struck out as best he could with one arm and one leg. The result was merely a whirling motion in the water, with no progress.

It was indeed a bitter prospect that he faced, for every instant he felt the growing numbness of these two remaining friends, and in a pitifully short while he knew that he would sink, hopelessly paralyzed, into the swirling depths of the Greenvale River!

CHAPTER III.

A DISASTROUS SLEIGH RIDE.

Suddenly there was a swishing sound in the air above Dick's head. A loop of rope settled down across his shoulders, and as a drowning man clutches a straw, so Dick grasped this bit of help.

"Now, hold on tight, Dick!" shouted Sam, who had been the lassoist of the occasion.

Dick held!

With all the strength of his body concentrated in the five fingers of the hand of the arm yet uncramped, Dick held. The boys pulled with might and main. Before he could realize it he was bumping into the edge of the solid ice.

"Now, there," said Alan cheerfully, "you're back again on the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

The ice was crunching and breaking off in places. But his rescuers lost no time in unceremoniously dragging our hero up over the edge, with their own feet braced on the solid portions further back.

"That was a close shave, Dick!" said Chester, who was helping to tug at the line with the rest.

Sam pulled Dick to his feet, and the lad stood there dripping like a water spaniel just out of a bath.

"Shave! That wasn't a shave—it was a shampoo!" said

Dick, looking down at himself. Then he remembered the plight of his sweetheart, and his face sobered up.

"Where is Bess?" he cried in worried tones.

Sam pointed to the bridge above, and then to the house at the roadside.

"She's all right now, Dick, so don't worry, old boy. They took her into that house to thaw out."

Partly relieved, but determined to make sure for himself, Dick began to rush ashore. But he was weak and lamed from the terrible ordeal through which he had just passed.

"Oh, but my legs are in a terrible shape!" he cried to Sam, who gamely helped him along. "I hope I'll get rid of these cramps. They are not as bad as they were in the water, anyway!"

Straight ahead he dragged his heavy limbs, and in a jiffy they were standing before the door of the little cottage of the storekeeper, by the end of the bridge.

"Who is it?" called a woman's voice as Dick Daresome knocked.

"I want to find out if Bess is safe?" called out the youth in anxiety.

"Oh, it's Dick!" cried a soft voice inside, and the door was opened more. "Come in, Dick. I'm just lying down to rest up, but I am all right now!"

His sweetheart was safe. Dick's heart beat joyously as he gazed at the pretty girl reclining on the settee in the corner of the little parlor.

Bess saw his glance and blushed furiously.

"I'm all bundled up in this kind lady's clothes, Dick, so you mustn't look at me too hard. My own clothes are drying out in the kitchen."

Dick laughed and continued to look.

"Well, you look prettier than ever, whoever the clothes belong to. I don't know what they are, but they look nice. What happened to you after you got up on the bridge?"

"Well," said Bess in a dazed sort of way, "I don't remember a thing about it, until I came to consciousness here in this nice, warm parlor. But I know I feel better now, that's certain!"

The wife of the storekeeper now interposed.

"My son Henry has a lot of clothes that are just about your size, and you can put them on if you want to let them dry. Do you?"

"You just bet I'll be glad to," said Dick gratefully.

The old lady hurried to the spare closet, and while she was gone Bess managed to give Dick a rewarding little kiss for what he had done.

"That's worth two Turkish baths, Bess," said he, but just then the old lady came back, and it will never be known what more Dick was going to say on the subject of rewards.

"Now, young folks, you are nearly ready, for in a few minutes the young lady will have her clothes all dried. So I think you had better be hustling back to your schools before you get into trouble."

"That's right," said Dick. "I'll go see what we can do about my skates and things."

He hurried out to rejoin his friends, who patiently waited outside.

"She's all right, boys," said Dick gleefully, "and I'm going to take her home to the schoolhouse by the round-about way. We'll have to go by the lower bridge now, for the ice is broken."

"Why don't you take her in a sleigh, Dick?" asked Sam, half joking.

"I would if I could," said Dick, "but there's no way of getting one hereabouts. The village is a mile and a half away, almost. What do you think?"

Just as they were speaking together before the house a sleigh came whizzing along the road, across the bridge toward them. In the dark it was almost impossible to see who was riding in it.

But the lamps on the side of the driver's seat shed their light straight on the faces of the boys.

"Why, halloo, thar, boys!" came a cheery voice.

"It's Dan, the coachman at the girls' academy," said Dick with delight, recognizing the tones of the speaker.

"Good work, Dan!" he called. "Gee, but we're glad to see you!"

The coachman pulled up the two restive horses.

"Whoa, you brutes!" he cried, and then when he had them stopped turned toward Dick. "What's the trouble, Dick?"

The boys told him about the breaking of the ice and the rescue which followed.

Dan whistled long and low.

"Wall, I think that there river is a treacherous old stream. It breaks up all the time just when you least expect it. I don't trust it at all. I'm powerful glad you were thar when Miss Bess fell in!"

Sam interrupted here.

"He wasn't there then, Dan," said he. "But Dick beat the world's record in getting there on speed. You should have seen him flash through the air!"

Dick became modest now and turned angrily on Sam.

"You good-for-nothing," he said half peevishly, "stop telling whoppers to Dan. I only got there as quick as I could. And it's lucky you fellows were there, or there'd be a beautiful double funeral next Sunday!"

The boys laughed, and Dick turned toward the house.

"Do you want to take Miss Bess and me back to the academy by the long road, Dan?" he asked.

"Sure," said Dan, "and you can have the back seat to yourselves. I've been taking one of the lady teachers up to the train at Merrivale village. Get in!"

Dick knocked at the door and by this time Bess was ready.

"I'll call for my wet clothes on the way back this evening, or else to-morrow morning," said Dick to the shopkeeper's kind-hearted wife. "Is that all right?"

It was all right. The two clambered into the sleigh, while the Merrivale lads started back across the bridge, waving their farewells.

"You'll miss your supper, Dick, if you take too long to say good-by!" called Chester teasingly.

"Yes, and remember it's a cold walk back home—take plenty of shoes!" added Sam.

"You boys, there, had better hustle or I'll beat you back by the other cut!" cried Dick, and with a clucking at the horses Dan started them along the road in the direction of Belleville village.

The girls' academy, as the reader probably remembers, was located on a small but picturesque island in the Greenvale River.

It was reached from the Merrivale side of the river by a low foot-bridge, while from the Belleville side came the wagon road and wide bridge, by which supplies were brought to the academy buildings.

After proceeding along this road to the west for a short way, Dan turned to the left and started south toward the bridge to the girls' school.

Hardly had he gone two hundred yards when one of the horses shied at something on the roadside. It was merely a bush or something of that sort. But the animal gave its fright to the teammate.

"Whoa!" cried Dan, pulling in on the lines with all his might.

"What is it, Dan?" cried Bess in half alarm from the rear seat, where she was cuddled into the arms of Dick.

"Nawthin'. These here horses are just skittish—they been out at pasture for a month or so, and ain't broke in again good yet!"

The animals pranced and kicked, and Dan brought the whip down across their backs with determination.

"I'll teach the pesky varmints what they're doing!" he cried, and he brought another lash.

The horses started ahead, but just as they did so the left rein broke from the tugging of the furious beasts.

"Gosh!" cried Dan as the brutes pulled ahead. He hauled and tugged, but to no avail, for they swung first to the right into a sort of snow-covered ditch at the roadside.

Then they started ahead at full speed.

The sleigh bounced and rolled from side to side, but the animals plunged on. Bess started to scream, but Dick clasped her hand encouragingly.

"Dan will pull them in all right," said Dick, "so there's no danger in letting them run."

Suddenly there was a crash. The sleigh was running at the side of the roadway, and had smashed into the low branches of an oak tree. Dan did not see the obstruction in time to avoid being struck by it.

He was knocked off into the snow bank, and the team, with its load lightened, sprang forward with renewed speed.

This alarming accident had happened almost before the young folks could realize it.

"Oh, Dick, they're running away in earnest now!" wailed Bess in natural terror.

Dick gritted his teeth and looked ahead at the flying team which was dashing them to some unknown finish.

"Bess, lie low there in the bottom of the sleigh, and I will stop them," he said.

"Dick, please don't do anything rash," said Bess fearfully. "You have risked your life enough for me already to-day. Please don't do this now!"

But Dick Daresome only smiled grimly and leaped lightly over the seat to the place in front.

Down the roadway they dashed, the snow flying beneath the skidding runners of the sleigh. Dick reached for the broken line, but it evaded his grasp.

"Be careful, Dick!" cried Bess from behind in a paroxysm of fear for her sweetheart. But Dick heeded it not.

"There's only one way to stop them," he cried, "and I'll do it!"

He prepared to clamber out on the tongue of the sleigh to grasp the reins up close to the horses' heads. But just as he started on this perilous undertaking the horses came to a cross-roads.

Swinging quickly to the left they started ahead with terrific speed. The way they curved about almost threw Dick out of the sleigh altogether.

"Gee! I nearly went that time myself, like Dan!" he muttered to himself. He held on gamely, and then looked up to see a terrible sight before him.

Not five hundred yards before him he could dimly make out the Greenvale River.

"They have taken the ford road!" said Dick in horror. "In three more minutes we will be dashed into the very stream from which we just escaped!"

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED BY A PENKNIFE.

"What can I do?" muttered Dick Daresome to himself.

He looked at the steeds before him, and suddenly a happy idea struck him.

"If I could only unhitch them it would be all right, for the little up-grade here would help slow up the sleigh!"

Dick looked down at the harness, where it was attached to the sleigh.

"I'll try it, by Jove!" he muttered, and leaned over. He tugged at the traces, which were not so far down. But all to no avail.

The sleigh was being dragged onward at an appalling rate.

Dick straightened up for an instant, and disconsolately stuck his hand into his pocket, as a fellow will. His hand struck the cool sides of a new pocket-knife which had been one of his Christmas presents.

"By jingo!" exclaimed he, "the very thing, if my luck stays."

Leaning over again, with the knife firmly grasped in his hands, he whipped at the leather strap with the sharp big blade of the new knife.

"If it only cuts!" he muttered, praying for aid in this desperate undertaking. He slashed away, and still no apparent result rewarded his effort.

He felt the blood rushing to his throbbing temples from this unnatural position. Yet he persisted, and suddenly beheld the leather strap give way with a snap.

"I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been taut that way," he thought, and he swung over to the other side to slash away at the other trace from the horse.

Crack! This one went, too.

"Now, there are two more, one for each horse," thought Dick as he persisted. There was but little time now before him for his last trial at the traces.

Again he cut, and this time the other one went by the board. He slashed at the remaining one and raised up with a breath of relief.

To his astonishment he beheld that the horses were pulling away, almost the same.

"Why—why——" he stammered. Then he saw the cause—there was a cross-piece in front, against which they were pushing, and to which part of the harness was attached.

"Oh, plague take these old-fashioned sleighs!" muttered Dick in desperation. "I can't do any more!"

Then in anger he slapped the flank of the right-hand horse.

"I'll get even with the brute, anyway!" he cried.

The blow stung, and the frightened horse with a fearful whinny jumped to one side. With lightning quickness Dick gave the other horse a jab, and it leaped to the other side.

This quick action saved the day, for the animals, surprised by the loosening of their harness, slowed up for an instant.

"Get out, quick, Bess!" called Dick, and his sweetheart, seeing the opportunity, leaped unharmed to the ground.

Dick had acted just as quickly, and he sprang out as the two horses hesitated, pulling against themselves in opposite directions.

"Whoa!" he shouted to the animals. Then he rushed at their heads, and before they could start on another mad course they were under control.

Bess rushed up to his side now and gave him a hand, as he tried to quiet the trembling steeds with caresses on their necks and heads.

"What on earth did you do, Dick?" asked Bess in surprise. "It looked to me as if we were entirely gone this time!"

Dick shook his head.

"I don't really know, Bess. I just slashed away with the only friend I had—that new knife of mine, and somehow or other it seemed to me that the harness went to pieces!"

"You saved us from another ducking!"

"It's the wrong bird this time, Bess—it wouldn't have been a duck, it would have been our goose—and mighty well cooked at that. But you know it's a fool for luck, so somehow that cutting hit just the right places!"

"It's no fool business at all, Dick. There does often

come some sort of thing in life which looks like luck. But it only comes to the fellows who are waiting to grab it. They wouldn't have stopped by luck of any sort if you hadn't been working so hard to get that luck in your clutches."

"I wonder where Dan can be? Maybe he's hurt," said Dick, starting to lead the now well-behaved team back to the main road. "You had better get inside that sleigh and ride. I nearly ruined this old-fashioned harness with my smart tricks. But I guess it will hold together long enough to get the sleigh home—if I do the leading!"

They progressed a little way, when a man came running down the dark road toward them.

"Dick Daresome! Is that you?" he bellowed.

"You bet it is, Dan!" shouted our hero, and the coachman, with an eased heart, though a bruised head, came rushing to them.

"Land sakes! but I was plumb worried so bad I didn't know I'd been bruised up," said he, wiping his forehead with a bandanna handkerchief.

"We're all right, but your harness was nearly ruined," said our friend as he relinquished his hold on the two horses.

"What's that?" asked Dan, so Dick recounted the story of his unexpected delivery from the danger with his pen-knife.

"Well, well!" said Dan, "that do beat all! It's worth working over the harness a whole day to mend it jest to have you do such a slick thing as that!"

He looked at the cut traces.

"Oh, I can fix them now so that they'll do for the road to the school building on the island, so wait jest a minute."

He fumbled around a little, used some strong twine to good advantage, and soon had the horses slowly going down the road toward the academy.

"Well, Dick," said Bess as she snuggled back into those overworked arms of Dick Daresome's, "you have earned a whole lot of rewards by all the things you've done to-day. Do you want the pay now?"

"Now? Oh, no," said Dick.

"Why, you mean old thing!" exclaimed the little beauty in indignation. "What do you mean by such a remark? You won't get them at all now, just for that!"

Dick laughed and then sighed.

"Oh, you girls are all alike! You never keep up with the times!"

Bess stiffened up and looked at him inquiringly.

"What's that got to do with rewards?" she asked suspiciously, studying his face.

"Well, don't you know how the instalment business has grown up in the modern business world? Well, you can just deliver my rewards to me with a deposit, and then pay on the instalment plan."

Dan was rude enough to be eavesdropping just at this particular speech. He was listening over his own shoulder, with a broad grin on his homely but good-natured face.

"Ho! ho!" he laughed, for this was too much for him.

But Dick and Bess were so preoccupied with the details of that first instalment that his impoliteness went absolutely unnoticed.

The sleigh ride, slow as it was, ended all too soon, and Dan brought the team up before the porch of the Greenvale Academy building with remarkable good style, considering the condition of his team's harness.

"Here we are!" said Dan, and the two youngsters looked up with surprise to see that their destination had been reached.

"Well, I'll see you to-morrow night, won't I, Dick?" asked Bess as he started away toward the foot-bridge for the Merrivale side of the river.

"Yes, indeed," said Dick; "and I'll bring Sam Thorpe with me to see Grace Gray."

He hurried on toward the academy, and in time reached it, safe and sound, but well fagged out with the exertions of the day.

As he reached the dormitory entrance he met Chester Brown.

"Say, Dick, it's too late for supper!" said Chester with a cheerful smile.

"Oh, thunder!" cried Dick, vexed. "I am hungry enough to eat off a hat-rack!"

"Well, it's not as bad as that. You can eat off your own library table there in the room if you want to."

"What do you mean, Chester?"

"Well, I spoke to the principal, and told him what had delayed you, and he sent an order over to our waiter at the table for him to leave some supper on a tray in your room!"

Dick leaped up the stairs with joy.

"Golly, but you're the sort of a friend to have, Chester!" said he. "You are always thinking of some little thing or other which will make other people happy! You'll get your reward some day!"

"I get it now in watching them enjoy themselves," said Chester, smiling happily.

Dick sat down to the cold but welcome repast and set to it with a will. Chester watched him from a vantage point on the bed.

"Say, there are some new visitors in our neighborhood, Dick," said he finally.

"What sort?"

"Well, we're honored by a little visitation from one of the most famous gipsy kings in this country—at least that's what he says he is."

"Gipsy? I don't understand. I never saw them anywhere in New York except in shows or fairs or something like that. I thought they all lived in the old country."

"Well," replied Chester, "there are about half a million of them in the valley of the Danube River, in Hungary, that's true. But there are many of them who come over to this country to see what they can get."

"If there is any resemblance between the stage ones and the kind you mention I'll bet the only things they don't get are chained down!"

"You're a good guesser the very first time," said Chester Brown, laughing.

"What are these gentlefolks doing here?" asked Dick curiously.

"Oh, they claim that they're down here to tell fortunes, and such foolishness. There are about twenty of them, and they all live in funny little old-fashioned prairie-schooner wagons."

Dick was interested indeed by this time.

"Well, did you see them yet?" he asked.

"No, but I've been hearing the boys tell about them. And I hear that old Farmer Gray, who supplies the school with garden sass and chickens, is going to supply less chickens for awhile. They do say that Gipsy John is a wonderful sleight-of-hand performer."

"What—why?" asked Dick, puzzled.

Chester grinned quizzically.

"Well, Gray's chickens are leaving their happy homes for some mysterious reason, and some of the boys down there at the gipsy camp in the hollow saw lots of chicken feathers, but no hen-houses. If that isn't clever work and slick sleight-of-hand I don't know!"

Dick laughed, too.

"Well, if that's the case, I think that there'll be something doing in the gipsy business around Merrivale for a little while. It will stop all this scrapping among ourselves and give us something to think about. I like excitement."

Dick was destined to get a great deal more excitement than he bargained for. Indeed, if he had been gifted with the second-sight claimed by the gipsies he would not have slept so soundly that night.

CHAPTER V.

A FIGHT WITH THE GIPSY KING.

Next day Dick Daresome's class work passed off smoothly enough, for he had prepared his work before going on the ice for the hockey practice.

"What about that suit of your clothes, Dick?" asked Sam at the luncheon hour. All the boys were gathered together for the midday meal in the big dining-hall of Merrivale Academy.

"Oh, I nearly forgot them," said our friend with a start. "I must hustle down there right after the last lecture this afternoon and attend to them. They must be parboiled if they've been in front of that old lady's kitchen stove all this time!"

"Well, it always was a hot suit, anyway," said Dick's neighbor on the left.

Dick looked at him reproachfully.

"Wallace Clark, are you getting off those bum jokes again?" he said as if grievously wounded. "You are no friend of mine, that's certain."

The other lad wriggled around in his seat, while the

laugh was turned on him by the group which sat at table together, ten in all.

"Oh, see here, Dick Daresome," said Clark, "I've heard you get off worse jokes than that many a time. But that's always the way—no fellow ever appreciates another fellow's jokes! But I'll get even!"

He got up in pretended dudgeon, and strolled away toward his class-room.

There were only two periods after lunch, and Dick buttoned his overcoat tightly about his throat and started off toward the upper bridge over the Greenvale.

"Won't you go with me?" he asked Sam and Alan and lame Chester. But all the boys had one excuse or another, and so he had to proceed alone on his errand.

He whistled as he strolled along the lane leading from the academy building down to the turnpike, and then turned to the west toward the river.

"My! this walk is long when a fellow is alone," muttered Dick, "and I'll be glad when I get back to the school, for Sam and I must get ready to go to the academy on the island to-night."

He reached the cottage of the shopkeeper, Mrs. Squiggs, and soon had transferred his clothes—exchanging the ones of her son for his own, which he bore on his arm.

"You should have worn my boy's clothes here, and then you wouldn't have had to carry these all the way back," said the practical-minded old lady.

"Well, I will be blamed!" ejaculated Dick Daresome. "That was a silly thing to do, wasn't it?" he muttered. "I am walking in my sleep, I guess—or else am losing my mind! Well, I'll carry them back all right, anyway."

He thanked the old lady for her kindness and began to retrace his steps.

He had hardly gone along the road an eighth of a mile when he noticed that some one was walking behind him at no great distance. He turned about to look in an unconcerned way.

"Why, it's one of those gipsies!" exclaimed Dick under his breath in surprise.

The man was fantastically dressed, with all varied colors in his garments, and our hero had never beheld such a character anywhere but on the stage of a theater.

"Well, he looks like he'd not stop at anything, if it would mean a few cents to him," mused Dick, and then he went on his way.

Behind him followed the stranger, getting closer and closer.

"Hey, boy! Wait a minute!" called the man in a queer dialect, which resembled both the German and the Italian, in some queer combination.

Dick turned about and looked at the man. He was about fifty years old, and his black, hanging beard and mustache gave a villainous look that was in no way contradicted by the expression of the face above it.

"What do you want?" asked Dick simply.

He was not inclined to be sociable with such a character on a lonely country road and at such a time.

"Whata you got in zat bundle?" asked the man, coming closer.

He saw that Dick was youthful, and decided that the boy would be an easy victim to his trickery. But Dick Daresome was a different customer from any whom the gipsy had tricked before.

"None of your business," tartly responded Dick, turning and starting again in the direction of Merrivale. Though far from being timid Dick wished in the bottom of his heart that he had some weapon of defense, for he saw that he had a desperate character to deal with.

"Ah, ze lad is vair fresh. You tella me whata is in ze bundle, boy, or you be sorry!" cried the man with growing insolence. He was so big and bulky that he loomed over Dick when he strode to the side of the youth.

Dick looked up at him with unflinching expression.

"Say, my bossy friend," said Dick, not one whit abashed, "what are you up to? I'm walking along this road about my business, and you attend to yours!"

The gipsy laughed a snarling, cruel laugh as he leered at the youth.

"Ah, you t'inka you talk back to Gipsy John, the king! Well, I showa you!" he cried. With the words he snatched at the bundle, thinking doubtless that Dick Daresome, because of his youthful appearance, would be frightened at his own stalwart bulk.

But Dick was not frightened.

Instead, he looked back at the big gipsy just as fearlessly as if he towered above that insolent and pugnacious individual.

"Say," said Dick, losing his temper, "what are you butting in on me for, anyway? I want you to keep those dirty hands off my bundle, and I'll fix you if you don't!"

The big gipsy laughed uproariously. It was easy to see that he had never had experience with boarding-school lads, or he would have acted with more deliberation.

"Ho! ho! You fresha da kid—I heet you over de head wiz dis dirty hand!"

Dick laughed insolently at the man, and the latter made another vicious snatch for our young friend's bundle. He reasoned that there must indeed be something of value in it for a young chap to guard it against him with such pertinacity.

But Dick dodged as easily as if he were in a basketball game back in the academy gymnasium with his friends.

"You big, fat-faced chicken-thief!" cried Dick as the man staggered past him, carried away with the misspent force of the faulty blow. "You had better spend more time learning boxing and tell a few less fortunes!"

"I fixa you!" hissed Gipsy John, and he sprang at our hero again. The bundle Dick bore in his arms was knocked to the earth for an instant and the gipsy chuckled with glee.

"Aha!" he cried exultantly, and he reached forth his hand to grab it up.

But he reckoned without his host.

"It takes a bigger man than you to get it!" cried Dick

Daresome with spirit, and he made a football rush for the coveted bundle.

He caught the package deftly, and before the foreigner realized it the quick lad was laughing at him from a safe distance.

"Ah! you teenka zat you get away from Gipsy John, so!" hissed that gentleman as he clutched his fingers in a frenzy of rage. "Wella, boy, I teacha you de tricks which de gipsies know."

His black eyes fairly danced with rage as he glared at our young friend.

If ever looks could have killed, those glances should have merited capital punishment. But still Dick was undaunted by the threatening appearance of the gipsy king.

"Aw, go back and scare little schoolboys in the primary, but don't come around this academy town and talk like that, you big, greasy crook!"

The gipsy boiled now, and he sprang at Dick with a suddenness that almost overcame that youth's deftness on his feet. But again the lighter proportions of the youth were of great service.

He saw the attack and leaped back.

"Now is the scientific time to beat it!" muttered Dick to himself. "I'll run again and come another some other day!"

He whirled about, and in a jiffy, before Mr. Gipsy had an inkling of the plan, he was speeding down the roadway at a pace that was a killing one for a man of the foreigner's build.

"Aw, I catcha you!" cried the gipsy, and with the words he started after Dick.

Bang! bang!

Two pistol shots rang out on the afternoon air, to Dick's surprise.

"Huh! The old villain's taking pot shots at me!" murmured our hero as he sprang along with more incentive for escape. "Well, there's no use for me to stop and give him a better chance!"

Bang!

Another concussion rang out, and still Dick was untouched.

"His hand is wobbly from running!" thought Dick with satisfaction. He glanced behind him and beheld that the gipsy had stopped for a steady aim.

"Of all the old rascals, to shoot at a fellow when he doesn't even know what's in the bundle that he wants!" cried Dick to himself. "Well, I'll fool him, anyway, if I can!"

Instead of running straight now our hero began to run in a zigzag manner which completely set the would-be marksman at loggerheads with his aim.

"Ah, zat villain!" cried Gipsy John in anger. He pressed the trigger again and again.

Bang! bang!

"That leaves another shot if it's a six-shooter," muttered Dick as he beheld the man running after him once more. "He'll shoot again."

Even as he looked back over his shoulder another report rang forth.

Zzzt! The bullet whistled through the air behind him, and there was a tearing sound.

"Great guns, he's nearer the mark this time!" cried Dick, and he beheld the man tuck the revolver back into his wide, crimson scarf.

"So that's empty, now I'll give him French leave. I wonder what he hit." The lad looked down and saw with surprise a long tear in the bundle containing his dried clothes.

"Ho! ho! He hit something or other!" The youth whirled about now and started up the road.

The gipsy was after him, but Dick was far outclassing the pursuer until an unexpected slip of his ankle precipitated him into the ditch at the side of the road.

"Oh, great guns!" groaned Dick as he rolled over and over, still clutching the bundle of clothes. "It looks as if I were going to mix it up for sure this time!"

His lead had been a good one, but this unhappy tumble spoiled it all.

"At last, now, at last!" hissed Gipsy John as he dashed toward the Merrivalè boy.

Dick struggled to his feet just as the man rushed upon him. He looked up at the assailant, when he saw a sight which nearly froze his heart with horror.

"Great Scott! That knife is a yard long!" groaned Dick as he instinctively stepped back.

The move was the cause of another downfall, for he toppled over into the ditch again. With a yell of hatred and exultation the gipsy was upon him!

CHAPTER VI.

THE THWARTING OF GIPSY JOHN.

"Now, I hava da revenge!" cried the gipsy as he struck at our fallen hero with his cruel knife, snatched forth from some mysterious concealment in those queer garments.

"Nixie!" said Dick with a quick thought, and although he lay there almost helpless he did a certain little act which saved his life.

This was simply the intercepting of the blow with his bundle.

"Ugh!" grunted the villainous gipsy with the force of his stroke, but the keen blade did not reach Dick.

Instead, it was imbedded in the soft, clinging cloth of the wrapped-up suit, and there it stuck for an instant harmlessly.

The man was surprised at this quick muffling, as one might call it, of his stroke.

"There, take that!" cried Dick, and he swung straight up at the face of the gipsy while the man leaned above him. His strong right arm landed a terrible blow on the man's jaw, and the fellow let forth a howl of pain.

"Oooch!"

But Dick was not in a trifling mood now. Before the man could draw up the knife for another blow Dick caught him around the back of the neck with both hands.

"Now for a Japanese wrestling trick," murmured our friend. His foot shot up under the man's chest, while he tugged stoutly and quickly at the back of his neck with the clasped hands.

"Up!" grunted Dick, and up went the gipsy in a fraction of the time it takes to tell about it.

Straight into the air shot the man for an instant, and then he came down with a thud in the roadbed.

"Oho, Mr. Gipsy John!" shouted Dick derisively. He leaped to his feet, picked up the knife dropped by the assailant, and gathered up the much-fought-for package.

The gipsy landed with a force that knocked him speechless. But his eyes sent forth messages unfit for publication as he glared at our hero.

"Now, you be careful who you jump on next time!" said Dick, starting toward the academy again.

"I geta even with you!" cried Gipsy John, with gasps of hatred and exhaustion and pain mixed in equal parts.

"Oh, go talk to the old woman," said Dick. "If you try any funny actions around our academy you'll get beaten up and run out of the country."

Gipsy John sat up by this time and shook a fist at the departing youth.

"Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you what was in that bundle," called out Dick Daresome in a jeering tone.

The gipsy's eyes sparkled, and then his face reddened.

"Well," said Dick, undismayed, "it may please you to know that you were willing to take another's life for a suit of old clothes. Say, I wonder what you'd do for real money? I hate to think of it!"

With which parting shot Dick turned toward his academy and pursued the rest of the way unmolested.

"Where have you been, Dick?" asked Chester Brown, limping part way down the lane to meet him.

"Oh, I've been having my fortune told."

"Who told it?" asked Chester.

"Oh, our handsome and sweet-tempered friend, Gipsy John."

"I don't understand," said Chester. "What did he tell you?"

Dick laughed.

"Well, he said something about a dark man coming with a bundle soon, and my path being crossed by a white mule with a red-headed man on its back."

"Now, Dick!" protested Chester.

"Oh, there—anyway, I had the dickens own time with the dark man—only I was the one coming with a bundle!"

"Why, what do you mean? Tell me all about it," said Chester, scenting out a good adventure of some sort.

Dick told his friend all about it, and as the reader may guess Chester was very much worked up over the matter.

"Why, Dick, that man is a murderer—or just as good as one!"

"I would say, just as bad," prompted Dick. "But, anyway, I got even with him."

"Don't you think it for one little wee moment," said Chester. "I have heard of those gipsies, and they are said to be the most vindictive and revengeful people in the world."

"I'm not afraid of them," said Dick calmly.

"Well, I don't think you are. But, Dick, that fellow will be laying for you some way or other as long as they are in the neighborhood. They say he reigns over the rest of them just like a real king."

"He looks more like a dirty knave in a worn-out deck than a king," replied Dick Daresome, laughing.

"That's all right. He's the high card in that crowd of his; when he tells them to do something they'll do it, you just mark my words. He must be driven out of the country, Dick, at once."

Our hero was not perturbed, and started in to his room, for they had reached the dormitory building by this time.

"I've got to get to work on my studies for a little while, Chester," said Dick. "Meanwhile you can decide what is to be done with that old-clothes pirate and hen abductor."

He dodged into his study-room, and was soon hard at work.

He did not know that Chester was making the rounds of the boys' rooms and telling every fellow he could find about the adventure of Dick's.

In a little while the whole school was talking about the matter. Skinniman Perkins, the big, fat youth, who was also the school football captain, determined to call a mass meeting of the boys.

"Fellows, we must do something with that bunch of thieves and crooks before they carry away the dormitory building or me!" This brought a laugh which was far from displeasing to Perkins.

He was fat, and strong, and he knew it. So he enjoyed the joke of his weight with the other boys.

"Oh, what will we do?" asked one listless student.

"Do!" declared Sam Thorpe, who was also attending this first little informal gathering, "let's clean them out for good!"

"That's right," said Skinniman; "let's make a school affair of the whole business. What do you say, boys?"

"Great!" cried the others as they sallied around the hall to rouse up the others.

Sam knew that Dick would be the last to wish to join such an expedition until it was a settled plan. So he postponed notifying Dick until the last.

Soon the lads were gathered together around the corridors outside the doorway on the lower floor of the dormitory building.

Dick had not come down the stairway yet.

"What are we going to do now, boys?" asked Skinniman, who stood on one of the steps to get a commanding view of the others. "Here this gipsy villain has threatened the life of one of the Merrivale lads, and we must pay him back or

else there's no telling what desperate deed may be performed here."

"You're right, Skinniman!" cried one of the lads.

"Let's go down and bust up their camp!" cried another.

"Why not smoke them all out?" inquired a third with an inventive turn of mind.

"I've got a good scheme," said Chester Brown.

"What is it?" asked the others. "We're in for it, anyway!"

Chester stood up on the stairs to get their attention a little more.

"Boys, let's organize ourselves into a vigilance committee and do as they used to do in the old rough days in Texas and the Western States."

"What was that, Chester?" asked Sam, who was never very good on history.

"Why, we'll just send them a notice and tell them to clear out of the neighborhood or stand the consequences. What do you think of that idea? If they don't go, then we'll have some excuse for a little urging and coaxing of a very gentle nature."

"We will be gentle, all right!" laughed Sam.

"You bet we will!" said Skinniman.

Just at this speech Dick came down the steps and saw the gathering on the lower floor with surprise.

"Why, boys, what is all this about?" he asked.

"This is a meeting of the Merrivale Vigilance Committee," said Chester Brown.

"It looks like a committee and a half," said Dick; "but what are you so vigilant about?"

"Well, it's partly on your account," answered Skinniman. "We have all heard of the plucky scrap you had with that rascal of a gipsy, and we won't stand for a repetition of such a thing."

"We are going to send them a notice to get out while the getting is good," said Sam.

Dick looked about and shook his head.

"I think it's playing with dangerous toys, fellows," said he, "for they are dangerous and vengeful people, and if we get them riled there will be the very deuce to pay for some time. You mark my words, too!"

"Right you are, Dick," said Sam. "But if you think that Gipsy John is going home to his own campfire side and play tiddledy-winks you are mistaken."

"He's working up some plan to fix you right now, I'm sure," said Alan Brownson, "and if he will do you mean, Dick, he would do others the same way."

"That's right, I guess," said Dick, seeing the point of the reasoning. "There's no use in letting them ruin the neighborhood here about Merrivale."

Chester Brown had been scribbling on a pad in one corner of the hallway all this time. Now he spoke up.

"I have a little letter that ought to make Gipsy John sit up and take notice. Here it is, boys," and he read as follows:

"To GIRSY JOHN:

"The Merrivale Vigilance Committee has decided that you are a dangerous character, and you are hereby ordered to leave this neighborhood and move into another county. If you do not do this the authorities will be put upon your trail and you will be landed behind the prison bars, where you belong. Delay will result in your punishment in more than one way. Move, with your whole company of desperate characters.

"Signed, MERRIVALE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE."

The boys applauded this literary effort of the crippled lad's.

"That's real oratory," cried Sam, "and I guess it will do some good, all right!"

"How shall we get it to them?" asked Dick.

"Let's pay Sambo or one of the waiters a quarter to take it down to their camp. One of the darkies would be only too glad, and I don't believe that Sambo is afraid of anything much—except ghosts."

"You're right, Sam," said Dick; "he's the very fellow."

The message to Gipsy John was sealed and put into Sambo's hands for delivery.

The colored fellow hurried down to the gipsy camp so as to get back in time for supper. The Merrivale lads waited around eagerly to learn how their message had been taken.

Finally Sambo returned and they crowded around him to learn of his adventures.

"Laws-a-massy!" said the darky, with rolling eyes, "dat's de wust bunch I ebber run into! But dey didn't bluff yo' friend Sambo!"

The boys were all interest. They poured questions upon him so rapidly that he could not answer them all.

"Jest a minute, and I'll tell ye all about it!" said he.

"Well, what happened?" asked Chester.

"Oh, I jest took dat message to der gipsy king an' he read it to hisself. Den he stormed an' cussed aroun' in some foreign lingo. He look at me wid de evil eye. But hit don't scare Sambo Lee!"

"What did he say then, Sambo?"

"Wall, suh, he jest made a turrible face at me and start to'ard me as if he gwine ter eat me up. But I ain't very digestible, even if I does spend most of my time around a kitchen! Ha! ha! Wall, suh, I has bof han's in my pockets, and I pulls 'em out on dat ar gipsy feller!"

"Go on, Sambo—that's great!" cried Dick.

"Wall, I says to him, says I: 'See yere, man, I'll use dis yere razor an' dis yere shootin'-iron on yo' all ef yo' troubles me!' An' den he whirl aroun' an' start foh de rest of his bunch. Dey all looks at me powerful mean like. But dey don't do nuthin' to me, an' I comes on back yere unharmed!"

"How did they take it, Sambo?" asked Skinniman.

"Wall, dey was a heap of pow-wowin' goin' on when I left, an' I 'lows to myse'f dat dere'll be somp'n doin' down dere or up yere befoh long, young gemmen!"

The boys laughed at the prospect of some excitement.

"Wall, I doesn't want ter butt inter yo' plans at all—I hopes yo' all understan's dat. But I would suttunly like ter cyarve my initials in dat greasy-lookin' gipsy jes' foh luck. He ain't neither a white man, nor a cullud, nor even a octoroon. An' I doan' like dese yere mixed breeds. Dat man's dangerous. Yo' boys want to keep yo' eyes peeled."

With which judicious words of warning and advice Sambo repaired himself to his honorable toil of waiting on the table in the big dining-room.

The two hundred or so students of Merrivale Academy trooped into the dining-hall soon, and the word of the probable struggle with the gipsies passed from table to table like wild-fire.

"Well, Nash Clayton," asked one fellow at another table from Dick's, "are you going to get into this fun, because you don't like Daresome?"

The fellow addressed so, a big, burly chap, nodded his head.

"I think we'd all better forget our little quarrels on this sort of thing, and join in to help clean out the bunch of crooked gipsies. We'll need all our strength to run that bunch of desperate characters out."

His companions were astounded, for Clayton had been Dick Daresome's bitterest enemy.

"Oh, it's not on account of Daresome, but because I think we ought to run this as a school thing. I predict something doing within twenty-four hours."

His prediction was to come true sooner than any of them realized.

It is generally so with trouble, for that unwelcome visitor waits for no man, and scorns to arrive at predicted times. The boys had a bitter night's adventures before them all.

But this spirit of working together for once was to be an invaluable aid to them in their time of deadly peril from the villainies of the gipsy desperadoes.

"Can't we plan up any way to get the credit of this affair for ourselves, Nash?" asked one of the fellows.

"No, Chigger Howard, I don't think we can," replied Clayton. "Dick Daresome saved my life last week, and I haven't forgotten it yet. We can just let things go for awhile and then if those fellows do get fresh again we can see what can be done."

"You're right, I guess," replied Chigger. "We don't want to take any chances at getting bounced from the academy."

Chigger Howard was always afraid of taking a chance, and this remark brought the usual smile from his auditors. But they were used to Chigger and knew that he was not as much of a coward as they had sometimes thought.

The Clayton crowd separated and the boys left the big "mess room," as they called it, for their own rooms.

"Look out for any monkey business from the fortune-telling gent, Dick," warned Chester. "He's apt to be camping around on your trail, you know!"

Dick nodded, and agreed that this was a timely warning.

"I'll do it, Chester," said he, "but I really don't think

that the scalawag will be very quick to act. We must show them the first attack to-morrow."

"I am not so sure of that," answered the crippled lad, who had been musing over the situation. "We will just see, though, and time will tell which of us has the matter sized up right."

Dick worked for awhile over his lessons so as to have a free conscience for the evening.

But his thoughts wandered often afield—and that was in the direction of his sweetheart, on the island of the Green-vale.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIENDISH ACT OF REVENGE.

It had been easy for the gipsies to find out from whence came this insolent quit-leave notice.

It was as easy for such desperate minds to evolve some scheme of revenge which should repay all their ill feelings.

But their revenge was to be a quietly worked one, as the reader shall see.

Meanwhile Sam and Dick, forgetting about such dangers in the anticipations of a call at the Greenvale Academy for Girls, had donned their gladdest garments.

"Say, we've had so much excitement these last few days that we can't get time to even dress up well," said Dick to Sam.

"Oh, what's the use, anyway?" asked Sam. "We aren't any dudes, you know, Dick."

But, nevertheless, as Dick smilingly observed, Sam was very attentive to his mirror. The youth was more anxious to make a hit with Bess Morrison's roommate, Grace Gray, than he was willing to admit.

"Come on there, beau," said Dick, "you'll be so dazzling we can walk in the dark without any other sort of light."

The two boys started off on their way. Over the short cut they went and before long had reached the Academy Island after a brisk walk through the chill winter air.

The reader will have to guess all the nice things said and done during this call in the parlors of the girls' dormitory.

The period came to an end and the boys started back on their homeward path.

"Oh, the moon's gone down!" said Dick in surprise. "It was so bright when we came over that I thought we'd have the old man with the lantern to show us the way to go home."

The boys walked along humming softly to themselves. Each was lost in pleasant thoughts.

Then Sam quickly grasped Dick's arm, with a gesture of warning. Our hero looked up in surprise and followed Sam's pointing.

"What is it?" he asked in a low voice.

"Look at those two figures moving along that crest of the hill, near the academy," said Sam in a whisper.

They stopped in a dark clump of evergreens and gazed

with surprise and suspicion at the dark objects which glided noiselessly along the ridge.

"They're coming nearer," said our hero as they drew back still more into the shadow.

"Something queer, Dick," said Sam. "Duck down low and cover your face with your coat-sleeves so the white won't show."

The boys did this, and they were none too soon, for the two pedestrians were up close to them by this time.

They were talking together in low tones, in some strange guttural dialect. Dick recognized the tones of one as those of the gipsy with whom he had jousts early that day.

The men passed on with low jeering chuckles to themselves.

"Dick, what can they be doing up here?" asked Sam in alarm after the two had ambled along and disappeared in the direction of the gipsy camp.

Dick pondered for several minutes as they hastened quietly on toward the dormitory.

At last his mind was made up.

"I know what they're up to. I couldn't understand a word they said, but I am sure that they plan some sort of secret revenge on our academy."

"How do you know that?" queried Sam.

"Just by adding one and one together. They wouldn't be up here reconnoitering so if they did not plan just such a deed. Then their satisfaction and laughter to themselves make it plain that they have some plan which they think easy."

"Yes, that's evident, now that you point it out."

"And the only sort of plan which would be easy is one which would take the Merrivale boys by surprise. That means a night attack."

"Dick, you're a wonder of a detective!" said his roommate admiringly.

But modest Dick Daresome shook his head.

"Wait until we're out of the woods before you pin any medals on my vest, Sam," said he with a laugh.

"What sort of an attack do you think they are apt to make?" asked Sam, confident in Dick's ability to solve any sort of problem now.

"I can't say, but the way such sneaks and crooks are apt to work is by trickery, and I wouldn't be surprised at some sort of fire-brand work."

"Great guns!" said Sam. "That would mean perhaps that many lads would be burned to death, right in their beds. Oh, that's awful, Dick—awful!"

"Well, any man who would try to stab me when I had fallen in a ditch would not hesitate to do some other mean sort of revenge. Chester says that they are the trickiest people on earth."

The boys had reached the dormitory by this time, and they hurried up to their rooms, to bed, for they were both tired out.

"Do you think we ought to watch out for any trouble to-night?" asked Sam anxiously.

By the next remark Dick proved that he was still a be-

ginner at the detective work, for he miscalculated the shrewdness of his man.

"No, I don't think they will do anything to-night, for they will wait and see what we do to-morrow, without a doubt."

"Very well, then, I'll take your suggestion and pile into bed, for I'm a wreck."

It was very few minutes before both Sam and Dick were breathing regularly, in the manner of tired, healthy boys, and their thoughts were far away exploring the mysteries of dreamland.

Unknown to them several lithe, easy-walking figures had slipped up to the academy buildings, and under the direction of Gipsy John were carrying on some mysterious preparations.

"Now, John getta even!" hissed the villainous leader of the gipsy band as he strode up to the hallway on the lower floor and applied a light to a pile of dry sticks and bits of soft bark piled there.

Not a soul was stirring over the school.

For, unlike city buildings, this country location was so peaceful that such luxuries as watchmen were considered superfluous.

Crackle!

The little flames leaped up to the twigs above and caught with hungry quickness. The gipsy shut the doorway and started back with not a sound of warning noise.

At the other entry of the dormitory the same process had been carried out.

In a twinkling the two ends of the building were filling with smoke, and not a bit of warning was given to the sleeping inmates.

Up mounted the smoke, higher and higher in the halls. The woodwork of the entryway had caught ablaze by this time.

The red-tongued demons of fire spread further and further, while the crafty incendiaries crept back into the trees to watch the working of their king's revenge.

"Ah, zey burn—zey sizzle! I get even wiz zat boy!" chuckled the vengeful Gipsy John to himself.

Inside the dormitory the flames mounted up more and more, and a heavy pall of smoke now filtered into the various rooms.

Dick, half awake, began coughing violently, and the noise wakened his roommate.

Sam sat up in bed and gazed about him, choking at the heavy fumes of the scorching varnish and burning wood.

"Say, there's a fire somewhere, Dick," said Sam, rubbing his heavy, aching eyes and trying so hard to think.

"What? What's that?" asked Dick sleepily, coughing still more. "I don't understand."

He, too, rose up, and the smoke filled his nostrils. Now at last the peril brought our hero to his senses. He leaped out of bed and ran to the open window to gaze out.

"Sam, there's a fire somewhere! What can it be?"

Looking up and down outside the house, all seemed

peaceful and quiet. Then Dick rushed to the hall door. Here he was met by a terrific volume of smoke.

"Dick, that hallway must be ablaze!" cried Sam, too, who at last was able to think clearly.

"You bet it is!" cried Dick as he dashed back in his room.

He groped for his shoes and slipped into them with the calmness of a veteran fire-laddie. Then he slipped on his trousers and a coat.

"You'd better get some duds on, Sam, or you'll freeze if we get burned out!"

His roommate took this sage counsel and followed Dick's example. In a few more seconds Dick was rushing out into the hall, armed with his water-pitcher.

"Boys, wake up!" he bellowed, rushing along his floor from one door to the other.

"Fire! fire! fire!" cried Sam, doing a sort of Paul Revere ride of his own as well.

The Merrivale lads in this end of the dormitory were roused quickly and they rushed out into the smoke-congested halls.

"Downstairs, lads, to fight the flames! Bring your water-pitchers for a starter!" cried Dick Daresome. Then he remembered that there might be need of some warning in the other end of the dormitory, which could be reached quickly by the trap-door on the roof.

"Sam, you hustle up and go through that trap-door or transom on the roof, and wake up the fellows in the other end of the dormitory! We need all the help we can get!"

Sam followed this order, and soon was stirring up the alarmed lads in the other section of the building.

Dick started downstairs, choking, but bravely defying the fumes of the burning wood. He saw that the conflagration must be near the door, but could not exactly see what had been burning.

As he reached the bottom step he was thunderstruck to see the awful progress made by the flames.

"There's not a minute to lose, boys!" called the brave lad, throwing the contents of his water-pitcher on the flames. "The whole dormitory will be in flames in five minutes if we don't head them off!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FIGHTING THE DORMITORY BLAZE.

"Boys, boys!" rang out Dick's clear young voice, "we must get together in some sort of organization!"

The flames lit the hallway with a red, terrible glow, and the lads rushed hither and thither without system or result.

The few who had thought to bring down their water-pitchers tossed the liquid upon the tongues of fire without any appreciable result.

"Steady, there!" cried Skinniman Perkins, who came tearing along the hallway. "I elect Dick Daresome cap-

tain, and you've all got to take his bossing or else scrap with me!"

Dick was in a quandary. He knew not how or where to begin in his fight. He knew of no resources with which to combat the growing flames.

But, at any rate, the boys of the dormitory were all wakened and alarmed. In that measure had the revenge of the gipsy fallen short.

"Sam, have you got back from the other entry yet?" asked Dick.

"Yes," replied his roommate, hurrying down the steps, "and the boys over there are using the hose-line from the emergency fire-bracket."

"Dunce that I am!" said Dick. "Here I've forgotten all about that bunch of chemical engine things which are all lined up on the walls of each floor. Quick, boys—let's get them on to the blaze!"

The lads made a rush for the fire appliances, and in a few minutes the small but efficient nozzles from these little machines were at work on the flames around the lower floor.

"Now for those hand-grenades—you'll find two in every room!" shouted Dick, while the lads remembered those additional implements for the battling with the flames.

The grenades were soon in their hands.

Crash! crash!

As the bottles broke against the burning wall the dark spots spread and the chemicals ate into the flames.

"There, we are getting the best of it!" shouted Dick cheerily. "Now, let us play this little stream here upon the flames along the edge of the walls. The grenades seem to do no good here."

Dick grasped the hose of one of the machines, while two other lads held it for him.

Sssst! sssst! sssst!

"There, that much is not to fight again!" said our hero.

The flames had almost disappeared by this time, thanks to the quick action of the boys.

"Now, let's light up here and see what was the cause of this, if we can," said Sam. For he and Dick both had forgotten, in their excitement, the evidence of the two lonely walkers the night before.

They brought down some lamps from the rooms, while Dick and Skinniman soused out the last vestige of fire with the remainder of the fluid.

Then Dick looked over Sam's shoulder and started back in dismay. He pointed an angry finger at some telltale pieces of wood and tinder which still remained as mute witnesses of the gipsy's wickedness.

"Look there, fellows!" shouted Dick.

"Why, what does it mean?" asked Wallace Clark, examining the place with surprise. "Is it a joke that some one has been playing?"

"Ah, that's a deadly sort of joke!" said Skinniman.

"You bet it is!" said Dick.

"That's where the blaze began," said Sam.

Then Dick remembered the sight of the night before.

"Oh, what a dolt I was, Sam, to think they would wait! It was all my own idiocy."

"Why, Dick, what is the matter?" asked Chester Brown. "You didn't have anything to do with this?"

"I did in this way, Chester—that Sam and I saw two of the gipsies sneaking around the academy, having a good size-up of everything. If I had warned you all we could have laid in wait for them."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"Oh, silly that I was, I just thought that they wouldn't do anything before to-morrow. Thus we lost our chance. And it was by the merest luck that we were not all burned alive. Will you fellows forgive me?"

"Fudge, Dick! Shut up blaming yourself. You helped enough getting the flames out. Let's go down there right now and clean up the gipsies!" cried Wallace.

"Down with the gipsies!" cried another lad.

"Down and out with them!" added a third.

The boys were in the mood to march down, half-naked as they were, to wreak a summary vengeance on the would-be murderers. But Dick Daresome was too cool-headed for such an act.

"No, fellows; let us wait until morning. We will show this proof to the proper authorities and they will take action against the villains."

"That's good advice, Dick," said Chester, "for that is a State's prison offense—to set fire to a house in which people are sleeping."

"I think that Gipsy John would bloom well under the tender care of a prison turnkey," said Skinniman.

"No, restrain yourselves, boys, and we will have just revenge to-morrow—mark my words!" counseled wise Dick.

Just as he was speaking the principal rushed in the entry.

"Daresome, what is all this row?" he inquired with a white face and trembling voice. "One of the boys has brought me word that there has been some sort of incendiary blaze."

"It's all right, Mr. Principal," said Dick calmly. "We've been dousing it with all the chemicals in the building except hair tonic. It's all as dead as a door-nail now!"

The principal sniffed the smell of burnt wood, and his eyes fell on the pile of wood against the wall.

"Who did this? Do you suspect?" he cried. "Was it some of the boys of the rival school—or any one else. think you?"

"No, sir," said Dick. "I think it was no one but the desperate characters who are wandering about the country telling fortunes here in the neighborhood by day and robbing hen-roosts and warerooms by night."

"You mean the gipsies?" cried the principal.

"Yes," said Dick, and he recounted the episode of his fight with Gipsy John and the two spies of the night before.

"Ah, you are still getting into brawls, Daresome," said the principal, sighing. "It is bound, as in this case, to react on the school."

"But do you expect me to let that sort of man rob me in

broad daylight on the highway, when I've strength enough to resist him?" demanded Dick in surprise.

The principal shook his head.

"No, that's true. But I hope we will be able to rid the neighborhood of such pests before they do any more damage. I will report the matter to the authorities myself to-morrow morning. I will step around to see if all is well there in the other entry."

So saying the principal hurried out in a much better frame of mind than when he started toward the dormitory.

The boys went up to their rooms, promising themselves good sport upon the morrow.

"Well, Chester, we'll make the gipsies see some new fortunes for themselves, won't we?" asked Dick. "What do you say to the whole bunch of us going down there and chasing them away from the hollow?"

Sam was pleased.

"That's the original plan, Dick," said he, "and we'll carry it out with all the snap and go of an old-fashioned Texas Ranger business. When shall we go there?"

"Well, it seems to me that we ought to get over there at the lunch hour, before they have chances to get away. That's late, but we can't afford to play hookey from our classes to go any sooner."

The lads turned into their beds again, and oh! how they slept until the morning came with its routine duties. They did not realize that the gipsies were preparing to start early in the day for parts less dangerous.

But such was the case, and when the lads swarmed down into the hollow where the camp had been all they found were the remains of many unfortunate chickens and turkeys, levied as tribute from neighbors, and the charred remains of the campfire.

"Stung!" cried the boys in disappointment as they looked at each other crestfallen.

"Well, we'll have to be satisfied with having driven them away," said Dick. "Maybe the principal, with his pull, can lodge a complaint against them with the State authorities. Let's go back and get our lunch!"

The Merrivales turned back again, and you would have thought they had lost a championship game at football or baseball to judge from the forlorn looks of the boys.

But they ate enough to put them in better humor again.

After the classes in the afternoon had been completed Dick and Sam started on a little walk down toward the hollow where they had been disappointed earlier in the day.

They had just reached this place and were looking about them at the traces of the late visitors when they heard a voice calling.

"Ho, there, Dick! Is that you and Sam?"

The boys, turning about, perceived Dan, the coachman of the girls' academy.

"Sure, and it's nobody else in the wide world," replied Dick cheerfully. "What are you doing over here, Dan?"

"Oh, I am worried as kin be, and I've got bad news for you, too!"

Dick turned pale, for he divined some trouble for his little sweetheart.

"Why—why—what is it, Dan? Anything happened to Bess?"

"I don't know," replied the coachman. "But this morning she and Grace Gray started out without the permission of the preceptress to come to this camp to get the gipsy women to tell their fortunes. And, gosh! but they've not been seen since!"

"Great Scott!" cried Dick in alarm. "Are you sure about this?"

"You jest want to reckon I am, for I found out about it from some of the girls who got scared when they didn't turn up at lunch-time. Here it is three o'clock in the afternoon, and nary a sign of them. Where has them gipsies been camping?"

Dick's heart sank with fear for the fate of his sweetheart. He had heard of the way in which gipsies had stolen young girls to force them into their nomadic life.

But never before had he thought it really true in such a progressive, up-to-date place as the United States of the modern day.

"Dan, do you suppose that they could have abducted those girls?" cried Sam in a state of excitement, too.

"I surely don't know. But I reckon that something's wrong. Where did you say they was camping?"

Dick pointed to the remains of their campfires, and gave a gesture of despair.

"This is all that is left of them. They tried to set fire to our dormitory last night, because we ordered them out of the neighborhood."

"Wall, I declare!" cried honest Dan, astounded. "I knew they was tough critters, but I didn't know they was as bad as all that."

"Worse than that, I had a fight with their leader, or king, as he calls himself, Gipsy John, yesterday. Dan, he is one of the most vicious villains I've ever seen in real life. I only thought such characters were in story-books, but this fellow is awful!"

"You say they have gone away, then?" cried Dan. "Where have the varmints gone?"

"That's the question; we must follow them at all costs, for I believe those two girls are in their clutches, as surely as I believe you are standing here on the ground at my side!"

Dick gazed down at the earth and beheld the tracks of the wagons.

"A clue! We will follow!" he cried. "Come on, boys!"

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL OF GIPSY JOHN.

Up through a low-lying valley the three followed the trail of the gipsy wagons. The snow gave proof of the passage,

for it had fallen since the wagons had encamped in the hollow.

"They're making for the lower river road, and will cross over the Greenvale 'way down the river," said Dick.

"I reckon you're right, lad," said Dan, studying the tracks.

"Where can they be going to?" asked Sam, not understanding the idea of the other two.

"Why, don't you know that it is a very wild country down there, Sam, and it gets up into the mountainous regions? That's where they are making for!"

Dick strode on excitedly, while the other two had hard work holding their end of the pace.

Mile after mile they covered, and at last they came to the low covered bridge, and they started across this structure. It was one of the old-fashioned bridges, which have a covering and side walls of wood to protect the passage-way from floods and washouts.

The covered way was naturally clear of snow, and the three pursuers strode through easily.

"What's that?" exclaimed Dick Daresome.

The others looked in the direction of his sharp gaze, and then they rushed forward. On the dark, damp floor of the bridge was a folded piece of paper.

"It wouldn't show if there was any snow—that note's dropped there with a purpose," said Dan.

Dick's expression showed that he was of the same mind, too.

Snatching up the paper with eagerness, Dick read with startled eyes the following words, written in a scrawl almost unintelligible.

He could not recognize the handwriting until he came to the signature, when he beheld that of Bess Morrison.

"Help! We are two girls who have been kidnaped by a band of gipsies. They hold us for ransom. Are in covered wagon with red wheels. Passed over this road in afternoon.

"(Signed) BESS MORRISON AND GRACE GRAY."

Dan peered over Dick's shoulder as the youth read the pitiful message aloud.

"Wall, what d'ye think o' that!" he exclaimed in a voice of mingled astonishment and anger.

"We will follow the villains and fix them, all right!" cried Dick.

"I know what to do," said Dan, who had been thoughtful for an instant as he weighed over different plans in his mind. "Let's get some of the farmer folks around here to

help us. They are sore enough of this gipsy layout to lynch them on sight."

"Great!" cried Sam, sniffing joyously at excitement and the prospect of big doings, like a hound when it is let loose on the trail of game.

"We'll have some adventure out of this after all," said Dick, "unless I am much mistaken."

"Thar's a fine old granger lives about half a mile from this bridge who we'll get to help us—old Uncle Jedediah Spruce."

"Sounds like a comic song, that name," said Sam.

"Well, you'll find that he has a heart as big as a mill-wheel. And he'll lend us some horses to help us on our search. The preceptress of the academy would be wild if she knew where those poor girls are. But we'll catch up with them, all right," said Dan hopefully.

"Oh, and when we do!" cried Dick Daresome, gritting his teeth with rage. "Just you watch!"

"Now, see here, boys—you are two game chaps, but let me tell you this," said Dan, looking at the two room-mates. "You can't expect to go in and lick that bunch of pesky villains. I know them and their kind."

"We'll do our best, anyway," said Dick.

"You bet we will, and we're not afraid of them, either!" said Sam, chiming in.

Dan laughed and clapped his hands together with twinkling eyes as he watched the two game youngsters.

"Ye ain't afraid of nothing, anyway," said he approvingly. "Well, I am! And I'm going to get old Jedediah Spruce and his sons to help us on this business. He has four stalwart young bucks and they will come in handy."

Dick saw the wisdom of this, although, boy-like, he would have liked to carry out the rescue all by himself. He followed Dan when they came to the turnstile leading into Farmer Spruce's place.

"Hey, Mr. Spruce!" called Dan in a loud voice as he knocked. An old gentleman came to the door with his spectacles up over his forehead and a farmer's almanac in his hand.

"Wal, wal, wal! Ef it hain't Dan!" cried the old chap heartily. "Come right in hyar with your friends."

He swung the door back, and the three entered the kitchen. Mrs. Spruce was busily engaged in cutting biscuits on her baking table, and she smiled pleasantly at the boys.

"We can't stay, Uncle Jed," said Dan hurriedly, "for we're on the trail of some desperate characters!"

"Wal, I want to know!" ejaculated Uncle Jedediah in surprise, dropping his almanac on top of the kitten which

was having an exciting but one-sided game of football with a globe of yarn on the kitchen floor.

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Spruce, all agog with excitement over the prospect for some new gossip to retail to the choir at prayer-meeting that night.

"I will," said Dan. And then he did.

When the good old farmer and his wife learned of the dropped note they were still more amazed.

"I tell you," said Mrs. Spruce, "them young girls is bein' guided—I know it!"

"Well," said Dan with all due reverence, "I think they're being guided, too, but in the wrong direction. Those gipsies are headed straight for the mountains, and they evidently think they can hold up the girls' parents for some sort of ransom."

"It's turrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Spruce with her hands on her hips akimbo, forgetting all about the floury stains which she was leaving on her neat dress.

"I must call the boys at onct!" said the old man with growing excitement. He reached over to the side of the kitchen and began yanking lustily on a long rope.

"What's that?" asked Dick, but his ears answered the question.

It was an old-fashioned farm bell, and the old man knew that the sons would rush in from whatever part of the farm they happened to be in, fearing some trouble.

He was right. The four young farmers came rushing in breathlessly, and looked in surprise at the two strange youths. They recognized Dan, who was well known throughout the countryside.

"What's the row, Dan?" asked one of them.

"Any one killed?" asked the other, noticing that there was something seriously wrong.

"I hope no one sick," said the third.

"We'll help you, whatever it is," said the fourth, and the boys were cheered up immensely by this generous cordiality.

"It's just this way: those gipsies have passed here to-day and they've kidnaped a couple of the purtiest girls in the Greenvale Academy!" said Dan.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" cried the first son.

"That's what became of our turkeys," said another, "for I heerd 'em squawking a terrible lot this noon, and then they hain't been seen since!"

"Has them gipsies stolen any of our fowl?" cried the old man in a great rage.

"Yes, they has," said one of the sons, "and we'll get right on the trail at once. Kin you boys ride hossback?"

"Sure, we can," replied Dick, "and the sooner we get started the better we can ride!"

"Follow me, then!" cried the oldest son as he darted toward the door. "We'll get up a posse as we goes along!"

Another of the sons rushed into the storeroom and came out with an armful of shotguns, which had evidently been there on a rack.

"You certainly begin to look warlike," said Dick with a smile, despite his anxiety.

"Yes, and I know gipsies—that's why I do!" said the young Spruce. "Come on, now, and help carry one of these weepsons."

"Kin I help you, lads?" asked the old man as he watched them mount the horses.

"No, pap," said the oldest son. "I reckon as how we can give these here varmints a good dressing-down. Look at this!" he waved a long blacksnake whip that he had hooked on to his saddle pommel.

"Good-by, then—good luck, lads!" called the old man.

The chasers started galloping down the snow-covered road. At last they came to a tollgate and drew up beside it. Within they found the old man who was its keeper tied to the floor, with several livid lashes across his face.

"Why, Hank! What's the matter?" cried one of the Spruce lads.

"Them gipsies tied me up here four hours ago, and smashed the tollgate, too," said the old fellow, tremulous with pain and anger, as he was released.

"Did they break the gate?" cried Sam.

"Yes, the villains, and they robbed the drawer of my till here, and when I tried to keep them out they bound me up and lashed me."

"The contemptible cowards!" cried Dick with disgust. "Let's hurry and catch them."

The tollhouse was stationed at a crossroads forking.

"Which way did they go, Hank?" asked one of the Spruce boys.

"I can't recollect," said the old man. "I was too dazed by their beatin'. But I'll get even with them if I ever see them again!"

"We'll get even with them for you," said Dick, and he hurried outside. A careful examination of the snow showed no telltale traces which would guide them, for many teams had passed over since the gipsies' retreat along the byway.

Dan was not to be thwarted, however.

He carefully examined the ground for many yards along both roads, and then came back smiling.

"I found their tracks," said he. "I noticed that they had one horse which was only shod on the two catty-corner feet. So that track goes right along here to the right."

"Good for Dan!" cried the boys.

"We're off!" called Dan, leaping to his mount again.
 "Good-by, Hank; we'll square the account for you!"

"You bet we will—we've some of our own," said Dick as they galloped along the wintry road.

The gipsies had taken the road which led into the hill section, and the scenery became more and more rugged.

"Say, if they had been left alone they would have made a dandy getaway, wouldn't they, Dick?" asked Sam.

"You bet, and we'll have no easy time trying to manage a getaway with those girls. It was lucky that Bess thought to drop that little note in the darkness of that covered bridge, or we might have given up the trail. Isn't it so?"

"Hurry up, boys—it will be dark soon," cried Dan, "and those folks at the academy will be fairly frantic."

Along they sped, for the dusk was rapidly falling. There was not a minute to be wasted if they were to save the girls from the clutches of the villains.

"Great guns!" said Dick to his roommate, who rode at his side on one of the sturdy farm mounts, "a fellow would think that we were in the mountains of Spain or Sicily, where they have real, live brigands growing on every tree!"

"That's right, Dick," said Sam; "but it just shows that you never can tell what will happen even in the most peaceful place."

"I just guess these fellows are so desperate by the cold weather that they have been stealing everything they could lay their hands on. Then they decided to make a good haul while they were at it, and so probably got up the scheme of holding the girls for a ransom."

"Well, would they get it?"

"Oh, I don't know; but I imagine that Mrs. Ferguson, the head of the Greenvale Girls' Academy, would be willing to pay some money to get them back. It would ruin the reputation of her school if parents thought that their daughters could be kidnaped."

"You've got a good guesser, Dick," said Sam.

Just then there was a warning cry, not loud but very audible, from one of the riders in front.

"Boys," he called back softly, "I see a fire burning ahead on the hillside. There's another. I think the gipsies are starting to encamp for the night."

The party slowed down and held a council of war.

Dan was for slipping up slowly, but the oldest Spruce boy had another scheme.

"If we parley around here them varmints will catch on and spirit the girls into hiding somewhere and we'll have the dickens own time gittin' 'em. I've heerd of their tricks before."

Dan hesitated.

"What shall we do then, boys?" he asked.

"Let's charge them and ride right into their midst and surround the wagon with red wheels," said a clear young voice.

The speaker was Dick Daresome.

His spirit of reckless daring infused the others as well.

"Good boy!" they cried. "Lead on!"

CHAPTER X.

A BATTLE WITH MODERN BANDITS.

Straight up the road dashed the rescuing party without hesitation. Dick led the van, for he was intent only on one thought. He must save Bess Morrison at all costs.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Dick, his blood coursing madly with the excitement of it all.

Clippety-clippety-clip!

Along the frozen road dashed the seven horsemen.

Straight into the gully at the roadside, where the gipsies were starting to encamp! Dick led the van, and as his horse reached the group of wagons he saw consternation depicted on every face.

"Zey are after us!" called out a bellowing voice which Dick recognized as that of Gipsy John, their leader.

Our hero chuckled to himself.

"He's behind time—we're through being after them—we've caught up," he muttered with a grim smile.

"Right for the wagon, boys!" shouted Dan.

His keen eyes were watching the gipsies and he beheld that they sprang toward one particular vehicle which was tightly closed. The leader stood before it with his long knife drawn for the attack.

"Hands up, thar!" cried Dan, and he pointed one of the shotguns at the fellow. The man growled surlily and raised his hands slowly above his head.

"Oh, help, help!" came in smothered tones from within the wagon. Dick recognized the voice of his sweetheart. His blood tingled madly.

He leaped thoughtlessly from his steed and sprang toward the wagon in which he knew the beautiful girl to be imprisoned.

Again she raised her piteous call for aid, and the hearers' hearts were stirred to their innermost depths.

"Help! Help! He——"

The words were suddenly choked up with a gurgle. Dick's face blanched as he realized that Bess was receiving some

sort of brutal silencing inside the mysterious closed gipsy van.

"Oh, come, come!" screamed another voice. This was that of Grace Gray, Bess' roommate. Her cry was stopped as suddenly.

"Let me in there!" cried Dick furiously, dashing toward the big van. A burly figure stepped in his way.

It was Gipsy John.

"Aha!" cried that worthy with a cry of fury, "eet is ze little smarta man! I fixa you dis time!"

He drew back his arm to stab our hero, who was unarmed, save with a riding-whip which had been handed him by one of the Spruce fellows with which to stir up his mount.

Whish! Swip!

The whip was brought with terrible force across the swarthy countenance of the gipsy. The man gave a scream of pain and dropped the knife with which he had menaced Dick.

"There's another for the old tollgate man!" cried our hero, warming up to his work.

Swish! Again he brought the leather stock across the villain's face, and this time the pain must have been horrible, for Dick had strong arms, the whip had a strong swing, and it was not kept away from its target by anything!

"Wow!" screeched the villain, temporarily blinded by the blows. He clasped his hands to his forehead and staggered away gropingly.

"Get into the wagon, Dick!" cried Dan, covering one of the gipsy desperadoes who was striving to cut Dick from the rear.

"Drop that knife, you scoundrel!" cried Sam, who delivered a ferocious blow with the butt of his gun on the shoulder of one of the others who would have attacked our hero.

Dick, without a word, picked up the glittering knife, but used it for a more peaceful purpose.

Under the protecting cover of the shotguns of his friends, who covered the menacing gipsies, Dick clambered up on the wheels. Then he swung at the tightly drawn canvas sides of the gipsy wagon.

Swish! Rip!

How the blade cut through the stout cloth, and Dick was glad that he had found a knife so well sharpened, although its victim in his case was not a member of the human family.

"We'll get you out!" called out the youth as he cut open a wide aperture of the mysterious vehicle.

He began to clamber inside to the aid of his sweetheart when, suddenly, some one inside dealt him a terrific blow over the head with a heavy missile.

Dick tumbled out, not unconscious, but dazed and badly pained.

"What's that?" cried the oldest Spruce boy, and he rushed up to the opening, after leaping from his horse. He shoved the end of his double-barreled shotgun through it and then called out in a loud voice:

"If there's any more fighting back from you crooks we'll clean out the whole bunch of you!"

The gipsies at the edge of the crowd looked at each other shiftily, and Sam beheld that they were about to make a charge on the rescuers.

But Sam was by no means slow when it came to the use of ideas in time of need.

Quick as a flash he looked about, and in a loud tone of voice boldly said:

"It's about time for the sheriff and his posse to be here, isn't it, Dan?"

"Yes," cried Dan, "and then we'll burn a lot of these thugs at the stake if they do any more monkey business!"

This cowed the gipsies, and Dick, who had risen to his feet, clambered up again, this time carrying in his hand a revolver handed him by a Spruce boy.

"Now, make a move and I'll puncture you like a porous plaster, whoever you are!" said Dick.

Once inside he could see a dark figure leaning over the bound forms of the two gagged girls. The outlines showed against the pale glow on the canvas from the campfires without.

"Oh, there you are!" said Dick. "Well, you just back out of this wagon the fastest way you know how!"

The figure moved in a suspicious way.

"I'll blow the top of your head off if you don't get out of here—I've got a score to square!"

The figure backed slowly to the end of the wagon and then slipped out, on the side toward the campfire. This end was being watched by Dan.

What was the latter's surprise to see a beautiful girl drop to the ground and start to run.

She was dressed in the fantastic garb of the gipsies. But even in the light of the flickering campfire Dan could see that she had American features.

"Not so fast, there, my girl!" cried Dan, looking at her in surprise and waving his shotgun.

The girl saw his gesture and stopped, gazing at him with the startled yet unaffrighted eyes of a leopard. She was

indeed one of these wild people, despite her fair skin and features.

"Who are you?" cried Dan in astonishment.

The girl drew herself up proudly. "I am ze gipsy queen, zat is who I am!"

Dan laughed merrily.

"Aw, forget that there dialect. You're an American girl!"

The woman glared at him furiously.

"I am not!" she cried. "I am ze daughter of Gipsy John!"

Meanwhile Dick had unloosed the bonds of the two girls, who wept with relief at this unexpected rescue. Young Spruce helped them to leap to the ground.

"Well, Dick, we never thought we'd see civilization," said Bess, wiping away her girlish tears of happiness.

"Who was that woman?" asked Dick, gazing at the one who called herself the queen.

"She says she is Gipsy John's daughter," said Dan, "but she can't fool me. She's an American girl who has been stolen from her parents and adopted by these people."

"What shall we do with them?" asked Sam, for he realized that they had a dangerous proposition still before them if they intended meting out justice to the villainous Gipsy John.

"We'll 'tend to them, all right!" cried the older Spruce boy with boldness. "I'm going to arrest this here feller and take him back to the farm, and then to the lockup!"

"You no toucha me!" cried Gipsy John, still a little uncowed.

"Oh, won't I, my gay and festive buck?" cried the other. "I'm deputy sheriff of this county, and I calc'late as how I can teach you a few tricks you don't know."

Gipsy John lost some of his braggadocio now that he saw how well armed the rescuers were.

Dick helped Bess to mount his steed, while Sam did the same for Grace Gray, and the girls showed their joy at being at least a little way off the ground on which their late companions were so plentiful.

"You'll have to ride back as far as our farmhouse," said the biggest Spruce fellow.

"We'll have to do, anyway," said Bess, braving her timidity, "and if you don't mind it I guess we can stand it!"

So they started along a little way.

But Spruce, the eldest, called out to them.

"Wait a minute! I'm going to take some more company back with me!" called he, still unmounted. From some mysterious depths he had produced two enormous

revolvers of blued steel which looked very vicious in the dim light.

"Now, my amiable gipsy," said he, "you jest hold out your hands, or I'll teach you some new manners!"

The man started to hold out his hands, and then with a quick movement snatched the wrist of each of Spruce's hands.

The action was so sudden that the deputy sheriff had no time to snap his guns aside. But, he pulled the triggers for effect, knowing that both guns were pointed safely in air.

"Oh!" screamed the girls in unison.

The young gipsy queen gazed at this tragic scene with steady, unflinching, expressionless eyes. She seemed dazed.

But the young deputy was not a quitter. He tugged with his wrists and yanked away to elude the grasp of the determined gipsy. His friends feared to shoot in the half darkness for fear of the wounding of Spruce.

"I'll teach him!" suddenly cried Dan, the coachman. He reached for the blacksnake whip hanging on the saddle of the dismounted man's horse.

Dan's coaching experience came into good stead now, for with a swinging, clinging, ringing cut of that terrible whip he caught the man a lash around the shoulders which made him scream with pain.

"That's another for the old toll-keeper you beat up!" said Dan, and he swung again.

The gipsy leader stumbled to his knees begging piteously for mercy. At last the cruel fellow was cowed.

"Now you get up thar and stop that monkey business and I'll stop mine!" said Dan.

The man, thoroughly vanquished, staggered to his feet and looked at them with flaming but hopeless eyes.

"Bind up his wrists, Henry," said one of the Spruces, and in a twinkling the desperate fellow was helpless. The others of his band hung around waiting for the slightest slip-up for them to make an attack of rescue.

Dan saw this.

"Say, ef you fellers try any fresh work here we'll shoot up your whole kit and caboodle. We'll burn up these yere wagons and leave you out in the snow without any shelter."

The gipsies saw how determined he was. They looked askance at each other. But no man had the daring to lead the forlorn hope against these determined, well-armed strangers.

They were not such fighters with guns as they were with knives, so they were at an unkind disadvantage.

"Well, we're going to start. Here, you villain, come

around in front of my horse—I'm going to tether you to him!"

The gipsy leader walked around sullenly, and then Spruce turned toward the girl.

"Now, Miss Queenie, you are coming right along with me, and we'll see who you are and hand you over to the authorities."

The girl flared up at last.

"I will not move a step!" she cried petulantly.

"Oh, won't you?" sneered Spruce with a look of determination. "Wal, ef you don't I'll place a charge of abduction against this man, and he'll probably get lynched by the farmers. And I won't raise a hand."

The girl looked at her supposed father, and it was easy to see that there was some sort of rude affection between them. The man gazed at her pleadingly, but said never a word.

Perhaps he guessed what the deputy's purpose was in handing the girl over to the authorities.

"Won't you do it if I come wiz you?" she inquired, still showing the trace of the strange dialect.

"Come on," said Spruce simply. "But you must come along, or he'll get beat up all the way plumb to my house!"

The girl, with crushed spirit, acquiesced.

The little cavalcade started away, leaving behind them a cursing, howling, babbling group of angry gipsies.

The deputy sheriff turned in his saddle and he said:

"Say, my frisky friends, this here is a dangerous neighborhood for talented folks like you. Take my tip and go somewhere that's more appreciative of your particular brand. Beat it!"

The gipsies, turning sullenly, let the cavalcade depart in peace. In fact, they were powerless to do otherwise, for they knew the accuracy of the farmers in the use of shotguns.

"Now, you and your near-darter walk along there quietly and you won't get in no trouble," cautioned Spruce.

The rescuers and rescued at last arrived at the farmhouse, after a tiresome trip, for Dick and Sam led their charges and chargers along at a fast walk.

"Oh, but I'm glad to get to something like civilization again!" breathed Bess with a sigh of relief as she let Dick lift her down to the ground.

"Bess, I never saw such a beautiful farmhouse in my life," said Grace Gray as she gazed at the roomy old house.

"Wal, missie," said the deputy, "we cain't say as we're running any Waldorf-Astoria, whatever that may be, but, anyway, it's a improvement on the quarterdeck of a gipsy moving-wagon!"

The young folks were led into the house, while that shifty Gipsy John was incarcerated in the spare room, near the kitchen, carefully tied to the bedpost of the old-fashioned four-poster.

"I ain't goin' to lose this here fine bird after all the trouble we had in cotchin' him."

"Lawsee! I feel like I was keepin' a jail!" said Mrs. Spruce. "Jedediah, it do seem turrible and not a bit like church folks to keep that poor critter cooped up thar like a chicken!"

"Huh!" snorted the old man, "speakin' of chickens reminds me!" He stalked into the spare room and glared at the fellow.

"See here," cried the old man, out of patience, "you rapsallion, you took three of my best hen turkeys, and I want to know what you are going to do abaout it!"

The gipsy glared at the old farmer with his irate expression.

Then the gipsy, who, like many of his kind, was far from lacking in a sense of humor, laughed insolently in the old man's face.

"Well, eef you t'inka dey be lonesome ware dey are, why do you not senda da turkey to keepa dem sociable?"

Uncle Jedediah beat a hasty retreat before he should lose all control of his temper, and for the next half-hour the old fellow could be seen struggling with his own facial expression.

At last he was unable to hold in any longer, and he belowed forth with a good, old-fashioned country laugh, just as Mrs. Spruce was spreading the goodies out on the big table.

"Why, land sakes, Jedediah!" said she in surprise, "I do plumb believe you are affected by this here excitement. You are in that there nervous condition. Now you go right in the kitchen and set down!"

Uncle Jed continued to laugh.

"Why, Jedediah, what on airth is the trouble? You'd better go take one of them pills the doctor gave me for rheumatiz. I am sure it will help you in your trouble!"

This was too much for Uncle Jed, and with another wild roar of laughter he called in his sons and told them the joke.

Mrs. Spruce, sniffing audibly, muttered to herself.

"Lawsec, I don't see what these men folks can see to laugh about so. Well, well, them poor girls must be about starved to death."

The motherly old soul called to the girls, who had been washing off the dust and grime of their enforced ride in the

van. They came downstairs looking fresh and pretty, and my! how the Spruce boys did sit up and take notice!

"Oh, for gracious' sake, don't give our food on a spoon," groaned Dick in an agony of anticipation. "It looks too good to wait for plates—honest Injun!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Spruce, deprecating the goodies, as all good cooks always think they should do. "I burned a good deal of it because father was here laughing himself silly."

"What was the joks, Mr. Spruce?" asked Bess.

But just then the hospitable old farmer bethought himself of the two prisoners.

"That reminds me," said he, "I must give somethin' to them two. Why not bring the gal out here?"

He stepped into the room and dragged the unwilling gipsy girl out into the dining-room, while his wife placed a plate of food before the gipsy leader.

"Now sit down and tell us who you are," said the old fellow. But the girl just looked at them in a confused, frightened way, and barely nibbled her food.

She seemed to be remembering vague scenes, and every now and then her face would brighten as if she wanted to speak. Then silence would overcome her.

At last the meal was completed, with much jolly chatter. The old lady drew the supposed daughter of the prisoner aside, and then coaxingly tried to get her to tell about her past.

"My poor girl," said Mrs. Spruce, "tell me all about what you kin recollect."

The girl paled and then shuddered.

"I am ze gipsy—I want to be back with my people!"

"Now, there," said the old lady, "you've got the wrong ideer. It is easy to see that you are no gipsy! You are an American girl!"

The young woman started, for the first time understanding the significance of the remark.

"W'at you mean?" she asked in the broken dialect of her tribal associates.

"I mean that it's as plain as the nose on my face that you have been stolen by them rascals and brung up as a gipsy. They do it lots of times. They would have done it to these two girls if they hadn't been rescued. Don't you want to find out your real mother and father?"

The girl gazed at her with eyes for the first time softened in expression.

"Are all mothers and fathers like you?" she asked. "I thought zat Gipsy John was my father—but he beat me much!"

The old lady was weeping by this time.

"You poor child! Of course mothers and fathers are nice, and we'll find a way to learn who yours are. Can't you recollect?"

"No," said the girl, beginning to sob for the first time. "I belonga nobody!"

"Oh, it's impossible!" cried Mrs. Spruce, and Dick Daresome, who had paused at the threshold, heard these words. He was coming to say good-night, but now he said something else.

"You say you can't find out?" he cried eagerly.

"Yes," sobbed the girl, like a wild bird tamed.

"Then I will help you!" cried Dick Daresome.

"What! How can you?" asked Mrs. Spruce, taking hope again from his manly confidence.

"That's my secret," said Dick, and he whirled about to hunt the deputy.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN IT WORKS OUT FOR THE BEST.

Dick hurried to the dining-room, where the men were still chatting with the two girls and bestowing admiring glances which tickled Dick immensely, for he did not have a jealous bone in his body.

"Say, deputy sheriff, can you help me with that prisoner?" asked Dick suddenly. "I've a scheme which will make him come out with the news on that girl."

"What is it?" asked the official.

"Let's bluff him about what we're going to do to him and make him tell where she came from."

The deputy sheriff chuckled.

"You're a slick young rascal," he said approvingly. "You ought to make a good lawyer some day!"

"But I won't," said Dick, "for I'm going to be an architect."

"Well, then, that's how you're so good at planning things."

Our hero blushed and laughed modestly, then started toward the room in which the prisoner was shut.

They found the food all gone and about half the man's rope-bindings gnawed skilfully away.

"Oho!" said Dick, "he's an old hand at such things; in about five more minutes he would have taken French leave through the window of this room!"

Gipsy John growled to himself in his own gipsy dialect.

"It's all right when you say it in that, my friend," said Spruce, "but you'd better not translate it!"

Dick looked sternly and keenly at the man.

"See here, you are well known to the police," said our hero. It was a shrewd guess, for the man started as if he had been struck a blow.

"Eet is a lie!" he cried, parrying.

But Dick had seen his advantage.

"Oh, cut out that fancy language until you can say it to the turnkey in a jail. You are one of the crookedest men in the United States!"

Gipsy John trembled just a little as at some remembrance.

"Eet's not so!" he cried, vainly trying to regain his composure again.

"Yes, it is," cried Spruce, taking the lead set by Dick, "and I'm going to wire the police headquarters at New York. They've already sent out a description of you!"

"W'ata dat?" screeched the man, and his inquisitors saw that he had given away his hand completely. There was indeed some black marks on his record to bring forth such a response.

"Now, see here," said Dick, "unless you come right down to business we are going to prosecute you for abducting these girls, and then will report you to the New York police."

The man groveled and writhed in an extreme of anguish.

"Oh, whatta you want? You can have disa money which I got in my shirt—eet ees five hundreda dollar. You takea dat and let me go!"

The two fellows smiled at each other, but kept up their tactics.

"Now, see here, my friend," said Spruce, "you just tell us right off the bat what you did to get that young girl on your gang. Where did she come from?"

The gipsy's mouth closed like a trap.

Spruce took out a notebook and began to write.

"Attempt to kill," said he, reading off his list, "stealing, offering to bribe an officer of the law, abduction and attack of two young schoolgirls, resisting officer of the law, and I guess we can stir up a few murder charges as soon as we hear from New York."

This is part of what police officials call the "third degree." It is a system which will break down the most hardened criminal in time, while an innocent man will only get nervous and rattled, but, naturally, have nothing to tell.

The gipsy ground his teeth together in rage.

But his questioners continued.

"Are you going to tell what is the secret of that girl's life?" asked Spruce inexorably. "If you do we will not

notify New York, and will recommend clemency to the court here in the county. Otherwise——"

There was a wealth of meaning in the way in which he drawled that last expressive word.

The gipsy gave in.

"Yes—I tella you. I find her in Cleveland."

"Is that the truth? Who did you steal her from—who are her parents?" At first the fellow denied all knowledge. But at last he weakened again and gave some address, with more or less certainty.

"All right. Now, if that is right, we will recommend a light sentence. Otherwise you'll get all that the law allows, and I guess that is going some with a rapsallion like you!"

The deputy dashed out of the room. Dick followed him, leaving the door open and asking Sam to keep on guard over their shifty prisoner.

"Your name is Netta Wilson!" cried the deputy to the supposed gipsy girl.

She started and then burst into tears with a flood of memories sweeping over her.

"Yes—zat is it—but it is so dim!"

"Well, we'll attend to that, and meanwhile I'm going to take the gipsy kingpin up to our calaboose, and put him whar the dogs won't nibble at his toes!"

"You are to stay here for a day or so, until we hear from your folks," said Mrs. Spruce. "When we do then you can go on, for you have a home."

The girl was still weeping, and the two girls from Greenvale Academy shared her sweet tears in sympathy.

All around it was a most affecting occasion.

Even old Uncle Jedediah got quite choked up and had to blow his nose uproariously to conceal his emotion.

Then he thought about those poor, innocent young hen turkeys who had gone to their funeral pyres at the campfire blaze of the gipsy marauders.

"Wal, wal, I hope he has to stay in the lock-up for the rest of his natural life!" cried Uncle Jed.

The young folks started back toward the academy, this time in the farmer's big sleigh, with Dan and one of the Spruce boys on the front seat.

"Good-night, good-night!" cried every one, except the rescued gipsy girl and her scapegrace of a late lamented "father."

For many a long day Gipsy John had cause to rue his attack on the academy lad with his bundle of old clothes, for to this apparently unimportant little act dated all his misfortunes.

But Dick and his friends were in high spirits.

"Oh, but we'll get scolded when we get back to the academy, Dick!" said Bess with apprehension.

Dick looked worried himself, and then laughed his old-time, merry laugh.

"I'll bet you a box of store candy against a box of dormitory fudge," said he, "that I can fix it!"

"I take you up—it's cheap at half the price!"

Dick kept his own counsel, however, all the way home. Bess begged and coaxed to learn what he intended doing, but it was not until the big sleigh drew up before the steps of the academy porch that he unfolded his scheme.

"Dan, you go inside and ask Mrs. Ferguson if she will come out."

Dan did so with alacrity, suspecting the plan for action.

The preceptress rushed out, tearfully clasping the missing girls to her bosom.

"Oh, I thought you were stolen. Where have you been?" she cried.

"We were!" replied Bess.

"What!" exclaimed the good lady, preparing to faint.

"Oh, it's all right now, ma'am," put in Dan, detecting the signs of approaching stormy weather.

"But you girls went away from your classes without permission," said Mrs. Ferguson.

"Yes, but listen, Mrs. Ferguson, they won't do it again. You see, you ought really to hush this up, for it would be a bad story to leak out. Some of the parents might take their girls out of such a dangerous neighborhood for a boarding-school!"

Bess and Grace gasped at the daring of this remark. But Mrs. Ferguson bestowed a keen and appreciative eye upon Dick.

"Young man," said she, "some day you'll be President of the United States—mark my words!"

"Well, you will forgive them, won't you?" asked Dick.

"Yes, I will," she said, trying hard to keep a straight face. "But, girls, there are some callers on you inside who have been waiting all evening, and now they must go home."

"Who are they?" asked Dick in surprise.

"Oh, Dick!" exclaimed his sweetheart with a sly giggle as she nudged Grace Gray, "it is Stuart Armstrong and his friend Henry Benson, who were to come over and invite us to a dance for next week!"

"Waiting all evening—our worst enemies—oh! this is good!" he laughed gleefully and then stepped inside.

As he did so two fellows marched stiffly out the door, and

without so much as a nod of their heads they went on toward the bridge to the Belleville side.

"What do you think of that, Henry Benson?" asked the taller of the two.

"It's three times the limit!" exclaimed the other wrathfully. "But we'll get even, and I've a scheme that will make it a cinch!"

But Dick and his friends worried naught about the angry boys, while the girls knew that a little note of apology would smooth away the bitter feeling of rivalry.

"Good-night!" called Bess after Dick as he and Sam started for home, and the Spruce youth drove his sleigh down the road toward home.

"Good-night—see you soon again, Bess! And don't forget the gipsies!"

She never did.

The young girl was finally identified and brought back to parents who had mourned her for many years as dead. And one of the Spruce lads later on became a favored suitor—the very one who had threatened her with a revolver.

But that's another story.

Meanwhile Dick and Sam wended their way back to Merrivale with easy consciences and thankful hearts, for they had done their duty, and won out in a lot of ways by doing it!

THE END.

The next story of this series is entitled "DICK DARESOME'S STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP; OR, GETTING AHEAD OF HIS RIVALS." It is the best of the "Wide Awake Weekly" numbers issued thus far! Stirring in interest and taking up an entirely new field of boarding-school rivalry. Number 146. Don't miss it! Out next week!

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

A strong aromatic oil, used for flavoring purposes, is being distilled from the green leaves of the celery plant in Germany. One pound of oil is produced from one hundred pounds of leaves.

The Swiss press is agitated and indignant over the sentencing of a three-year-old child to three and one-half months' imprisonment for theft. In passing a toy store, the little fellow helped himself to two or three articles which were on exhibition outside the shop.

Quail are plentiful at Lake Nyanza, Africa, and after being snared in the grass by the natives they are kept in small wicker cages strung on a long pole stuck in the ground. When a sufficient number of quail have been collected they can be exchanged with a neighbor—like coupons—for wives.

In Henderson County, Texas, Cain Cox, five miles from Athens, has not only adhered to diversification in all its forms, raising fruit, tomatoes and the cereal and hay crops, as well as some cotton, but he has been investing some money in other experiments, some of which are about to turn out very profitably. One of his side experiments has been almonds, he having put in quite a number of the young trees about five years ago. The trees are now well grown, and are bearing fine almonds, though not as large nor as fine as the imported variety. The trees bore a few almonds last year and many more this year, and by another year Mr. Cox thinks he will get a crop large enough to market.

The button industry in Japan bids fair to prove a great success. Shell buttons, we learn from the report of the Yokohama Chamber of Commerce, were first imported from abroad a quarter of a century ago, when the demand for the article began to be felt, and since then this branch of industry has gradually sprung up, Osaka and its environs being the center. A great development of the industry has taken place of late, and large quantities of material are annually imported from the South Sea Islands, while the export to the Chinese and Indian markets has rapidly increased. According to the latest investigations, not less than 1,000,000 yen worth is exported annually from Osaka and its vicinity alone.

Genuine panamas are made from straw obtained by cutting into strips the leaves of the wild palm, which grows to a height of from seven to ten feet. Each leaf, when prepared

and dried, yields, on an average, thirty blades, each with a width of half an inch or so, and from seventeen to twenty inches long. Certain leaves of exceptional quality have a length of nearly thirty inches. The price of straw, which varies from year to year, fluctuates from ten to sixty cents a pound, while the weight of a panama being about ten ounces, the cost of raw material seldom exceeds thirty cents a hat, and averages twelve cents. For ordinary hats the straw is moistened with water, and the employee works six hours a day. It takes him from six to seven days to pleat a \$1 hat; fifteen to twenty days for a more expensive to a \$3 one. But with the better grade of hat the straw is never wetted. The process of manufacture can be undertaken only in the morning and the evening, when the atmosphere is very humid. The mesh, too, being far more intricate, a man can easily find work for six weeks on a hat of the kind that fetches \$20. Hats of separately selected leaf require yet longer in the making, and sell much dearer. The value of a panama depends at once upon the quality of straw, the lightness of the hat, its suppleness and power of proof, besides the workmanship. Good work is recognizable in the regularity inside of pleating from the crown to brim. The hats most in demand realize in the ordinary quality from \$2.50 to \$4; from \$5 to \$8 in the medium grade; while the pick touch \$10 to \$50, and even more.

RIB TICKLERS.

"Warmer, with greater humidity," said the weather clerk. "You've giving us hot air," grumbled the people, viewing him with distinct disfavor.

Easterner—I see it stated that Tulare Lake, in California, has increased miles in width and length this year. Californian—Shouldn't wonder. California is growing right along.

At one of the clubs an old member, a clever chap, was being frightfully bored by his vis-a-vis at the table in the cafe one night, the latter individual being as dull as the former was bright. The talk was fast becoming unendurable when the first named member chanced to observe a man at the other end of the dining-room yawning in a manner that threatened to dislocate his jaws. "Look!" he exclaimed in desperation, "we are overheard!"

A Sunday-school teacher had instructed her class that each child should repeat a verse of Scripture when the offering was made. The plate, containing many pennies, had gone down the line when the child next the last said, "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," depositing a nickel. Either the verses had given out, or the child at the end of the bench was overcome at her neighbor's generosity, for she said, "A fool and hith money are thoon parted!"

Beatrice, aged five, spent the day playing with Tommy, her little four-year-old neighbor. When she was ready to go home she hugged and kissed Tommy, against his tearful protestations. Reporting the matter to her mother, she concluded with: "But, mother, Tommy should have been brave about it, any way, shouldn't he?"

An Oxford student was showing two fair cousins through Christchurch College. "That," he explained, "is the picture gallery; that, the library; and that tower contains the famous bell, 'Great Tom of Oxford.'" Stooping quickly, he picked up a stone and sent it crashing through a second-story, ivy-framed window, where there immediately appeared a face, purple with rage. "And that," added the young man helpfully, "is the dean." Thus it was that he came to leave one seat of learning for another.

In the Folds of the Serpent

By Horace Appleton.

One day I went out in my boat duck-shooting.

I had got near enough for a shot and hit two of them, but they didn't fall into the water.

They fluttered along until they fell among the tall grass up in the cove.

The water was low, and the place was dry where they were.

I pulled up as far as I could, and then got out and waded up.

I knew very near where one of the ducks had fallen, and very soon had my eye on it.

As I ran up to take it I saw the head of a blacksnake pop up and catch it by the wing.

I ran up and snatched the bird away.

I had left my gun in the boat and had nothing to kill the chap with, but as I took the duck I put my foot upon the thief's neck.

The ground was moist and slimy, and, as the snake had his body braced among the roots of the stout reeds, he took his head out from under my foot as quick as a man could think.

I thought I would run back to my boat and get my gun and try to kill this fellow, and I had just turned for this purpose when I felt something strike my leg.

I looked down and found that the snake had taken a turn around my left leg with his tail, and was in the act of clearing his body from the grass.

I dropped the duck and gave a smart kick, but that didn't loosen him, so I tried to put my right foot upon him, but I might as well have tried to put my foot on a streak of lightning.

I had expected to see a snake four or five feet long, but instead of that he was nearly eight feet and a half!

Still I hadn't yet any great fear, for I supposed that when I came to put my hands on him I could easily take him off, for I was pretty strong in the arms.

In a few seconds he had his body all clear, and it was then that the first real thrill shot through me.

There he held himself by the simple turn around my leg, and with his back arched in and out he brought his head just on a level with mine.

I made a grab for him, but missed him, and then, as quick as you can snap your finger, he swept his head around under my arm—clear around my body—and then straightened up and looked me in the face again.

I gave another grab at him, and another, as quick as I could, but he dodged me in spite of all I could do.

I next felt the snake's body working its way up.

The turn of the tail was changed to my thigh, and the coil around me commenced to tighten.

I grasped him as near the head as possible by taking hold where he was around me—for he couldn't dodge that part—and tried to turn him off, but this only made it worse.

The fellow had now drawn himself up so high, and stretched himself so, that he whipped another turn about me.

His tail was now around my left thigh and the rest of him turned twice around my body.

All this had occupied about half a minute from the time he first got the turn around my leg.

The snake now had his head right in front of my face, and he tried to make his way to my mouth.

What his intention was I cannot surely tell, though I have always believed that he knew he could strangle me in that way.

He struck me one blow in the mouth that hurt me considerably, and after that I got him by the neck, and there I meant to hold him—at least, so that he should not strike me again.

But about this time another difficulty arose.

The moment I grasped the snake by the neck he commenced to tighten his folds about my body.

It wasn't over a few seconds before I discovered that he

would soon squeeze the breath out of me in that way, and I determined to unwind him.

I held the snake with the left hand, and my idea was to pass his head around my back until I could reach it with my right, and so unwind him.

I could press the fellow's head down under my arm, but to get it around so as to reach it with my right hand I could not.

I tried—I put all my power into that one arm—but I could not do it.

I could get the head just about under my armpit, but here my strength was applied to a disadvantage, and I could do no more.

Until this moment I had not been really frightened.

I had believed I could unwind the serpent when I tried.

I never dreamed what power he had.

My next thought was of my jack-knife, but the larger coil of the snake was directly over my pocket, and I could not get it.

I now for the first time called out for help.

I yelled with all my might, and yet I knew the trial was next to useless, for no one could easily gain the place where I was except with a boat.

Yet I called out, hoping against hope.

I grasped the snake by the body and pulled.

I tried to break its neck.

This plan presented itself with a gleam of promise, but it amounted to nothing.

I might as well have tried to break a rope by bending it forward or backward.

A full minute had now passed from the time when first I tried to pass the snake's head around my back.

His body had become so elongated by his gradual pressure around my body that he had room to carry his head around in a free and symmetrical curve.

He had slipped from my grasp, and when I next caught him I found that I was weaker than before.

I could not hold him!

The excitement had prevented me from noticing this until now.

For a few moments I was in a perfect frenzy.

I leaped up and down, cried out as loud as I could, and grasped the snake with all my might, but it availed me nothing.

He slipped his head from my weakened hand and made a blow at my face, striking me fairly upon the closed lips.

This made me mad, and I gave the infernal thing another grasp with both hands, trying once more to twist its neck.

The only result was I got another blow upon the mouth.

But the moment of need was at hand.

I felt the coils growing tighter and tighter around my body, and my breath was growing weak.

A severe pain was beginning to result from the pressure, and I saw that the snake would soon have length enough for another turn.

He was drawn so tightly that the center of his body was no bigger than his head.

The black skin was drawn to a tension that seemed its utmost, and yet I could tell by the working of the large scales upon the belly that he was drawing himself tighter still.

"For mercy's sake!" I gasped, stricken with absolute terror. "What shall I do?"

What could I do?

The enemy for whom I had had at first so little thought was killing me—killing me slowly, openly, surely—and I had no help.

I, a stout, strong man, was being actually held at the deadly will of a blacksnake!

My breath was now short, faint and quick, and I knew that I was growing purple in the face.

My hands and arms were swollen and my fingers were numb.

I had let go of the snake's neck, and he now carried the upper part of his body in a graceful curve, his head vibrating from side to side with an undulating motion of extreme gracefulness.

At length I staggered.

I was losing my strength rapidly, and the pain of my body had become excruciating.

The snake's skin, where it was coiled about me, was so tight that it seemed almost transparent.

He had found me, or I had found him, in a state of hunger, his stomach free from food, and muscular force unimpaired.

A second time I staggered, and objects began to swim before me.

A dizzy sensation was in my head, a faintness at my heart, and a pain the most agonizing in my body.

The snake had three feet of body free.

He had drawn himself certainly three feet longer than before.

He darted his head under my right arm and brought it up over my shoulder, and, pressing his under jaw firmly down there, he gave a sudden wind that made me groan with new pain.

Each moment was an age of agony—each second a step nearer to death.

My knife!

Oh, if I could reach it!

Why not?

Why not tear it out?

My arms were free.

Why had I not thought of this before—when my hands had some strength in them?

Yet I would try it.

I collected all my remaining power for the effort and made the attempt.

My trousers were of blue cotton stuff, and very strong; I could not tear it.

I thought of the stitches.

They might not be so tenacious.

I grasped the cloth upon the inside of my thigh and gave my last atom of strength to the effort.

The stitches started—they gave way!

The result gave me hope, and hope gave me power.

Another pull—with both hands—and the pocket was laid bare.

With all the remaining force I could command—with hope of life, of home, of everything I loved on earth, in the effort—I caught the pocket upon the inside and bore down upon it.

There was a cracking of the threads, a sound of tearing cloth, and my knife was in my hands.

I had yet sense enough to know that the smallest blade was the sharpest, and I opened it.

With one quick, nervous movement I pressed the keen edge upon the tense skin and drew it across.

With a dull, tearing snap the body parted, and the snake fell to the ground in two pieces.

I staggered to the boat; I reached it, and there sank down.

I knew nothing more until I heard a voice calling me by name.

I opened my eyes and looked up.

My father stood over me with terror depicted upon his countenance.

I told him my story as best I could.

He went up and got the duck I had taken from the snake—the other one he could not find—and also brought the two pieces I had made of my enemy.

He told me he had heard me cry out, and at once started off in the large boat after me, though it was a long time ere he saw my boat.

I had lain there over half an hour when he found me.

When we reached home the snake was measured and found to be eight feet and four inches in length.

It was a month before I fully recovered from the effects of that hugging, and to this day there is something in the very name of snake that sends a chill of horror to my heart.

“HECTOR”

The first dog of any note that my father possessed was a black Newfoundland. He was a very powerful and intelligent beast. My father trained him well, and taught him to go from our country place to the town with a basket fastened around

his neck, with notes inside for the different tradespeople, who understood that he would readily give them up, and if required, would bring anything sent safely back. He was often dispatched for a car to a hotel about a mile distant. Hector would go into the yard and the hostler knew at once what he wanted. One day there was a strange man in the yard, who could not understand what Hector meant; but the dog would not be baffled. He went straight to the bar, and gently barked to gain attention.

“Ah!” said the girl, “Hector wants a car,” which settled the business.

At that time it was very dangerous to walk at night in the country roads. It was before the rural police were appointed. When my father was absent of an evening Hector was always sent to meet him. A spiked collar was put on to protect his throat. He was told to wait at a certain place, and he never failed to be there. One evening I was walking home with my father; it was so dark we could scarcely see anything. My father said: “We ought to have met George by this time. I told him to come with the lantern.”

We walked on a few yards, and Hector met us. He was half a mile ahead of his accustomed waiting-place. My father was a strict disciplinarian, and spoke sharply to the dog, scolding him for coming on. But I begged him not to do so, thinking there might be some reason for his coming. When we reached the stile to cross the fields the dog was restless, and growled savagely.

“Back, Hector, back!” said my father; but the dog disobeyed him, and bounded over first. “There is something the matter,” said my father as he took out his clasp-knife and opened it, whispering to me: “We may have a fight. Be sure you do not lay hold of my arm.” He then struck a light with his flint and steel, whereupon a man sprang up and moved on before us.

“Mind yourself, father,” said I; “Hector will take care of me.” The dear creature came close to my side and put his nose into my hand. I knew he would fight for us to the death; for though as gentle as a lamb to those he loved, he was fierce as a lion in defense of them. My father was a very powerful and fearless man. He had his daughter to protect, and his spirit was thoroughly roused; but he knew it would be well to trust to the sagacity of the dog, and see what he would do. When we reached the stile he stood still and growled. My father said: “Come, you fellows, come at once over this stile. I know you are there. Come at once, or I will set my dog upon you, and he will show you no mercy.”

There was a movement, and one, and then another man came grumbling. Hector stood firm, uttering a low, continued growl.

“Come along!” exclaimed my father; “there are more of you. You had better be quick.”

Another came, saying that he had as much right to the road as we had.

Still the dog would not cross the stile.

“There is another of you. If you do not come at once my dog will kill you.”

He saw the animal's patience was well-nigh exhausted. The last then slunk over, and the dog bounded over the stile into the lane. Then we knew the brave creature had saved us. When we came to the public-house, George, our man-servant, was sitting comfortably in the porch waiting for us with the lantern. He had seen two men, and was afraid to come on!

I could tell many interesting stories of this noble animal. His end was sad. When we were removing to another house he was taken to protect some of the things that were being put in the loft above the stable; the stupid man who put him there tied him up; the poor creature's feet had slipped, and when the door was opened next morning our faithful friend was found strangled.

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